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WILFRID CUMBERMEDE

BY

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"ROBERT FALCONER," "DAVID ELGINBROD,"
"ALEC FORBES OF HOWGLEN,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

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WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FROZEN STREAM.

BEFORE the Winter arrived, I was well, and Charley had recovered from the fatigue of watching me. One holiday, he and I set out alone to accomplish a scheme we had cherished from the first appearance of the frost. How it arose I hardly remember; I think it came of some remark Mr. Forest had made concerning the difference between the streams of Switzerland and England—those in the former country being emptiest, those in the latter fullest in the Winter. It was—when the frost should have bound up the sources of the beck which ran almost by our door, and it was no longer a stream, but a rope of ice—to take that rope for our

guide, and follow it as far as we could towards the secret recesses of its Summer birth.

Along the banks of the stream, we followed it up and up, meeting a varied loveliness which it would take the soul of a Wordsworth or a Ruskin to comprehend or express. To my poor faculty the splendour of the ice-crystals remains the one memorial thing. In those lonely watercourses the sun was gloriously busy, with none to praise him except Charley and me.

Where the banks were difficult we went down into the frozen bed, and there had story above story of piled-up loveliness, with opal and diamond cellars below. Spikes and stars crystalline radiated and refracted and reflected marvellously. But we did not reach the primary source of the stream by miles; we were stopped by a precipitous rock, down the face of which one half of the stream fell, while the other crept out of its foot, from a little cavernous opening about four feet high. Charley was a few yards ahead of me, and ran stooping into the cavern. I followed. But when I had gone as far as I dared for the darkness and the down-sloping roof, and saw no-

thing of him, I grew dismayed, and called him. There was no answer. With a thrill of horror my dream returned upon me. I got on my hands and knees and crept forward. A short way further the floor sank—only a little, I believe, but from the darkness I took the descent for an abyss into which Charley had fallen. I gave a shriek of despair, and scrambled out of the cave howling. In a moment he was by my side. He had only crept behind a projection for a trick: His remorse was extreme. He begged my pardon in the most agonized manner.

"Never mind, Charley," I said; "you didn't mean it."

"Yes, I did mean it," he returned. "The temptation came, and I yielded; only I did not know how dreadful it would be to you."

"Of course not. You wouldn't have done it if you had."

"How am I to know that, Wilfrid? I might have done it. Isn't it frightful that a body may go on and on till a thing is done, and then wish he hadn't done it? I am a despicable creature. Do you know, Wilfrid, I once shot a little bird

—for no good, but just to shoot at something. It wasn't that I didn't think of it—don't say that. I did think of it. I knew it was wrong. When I had levelled my gun, I thought of it quite plainly, and yet drew the trigger. It dropped, a heap of ruffled feathers. I shall never get that little bird out of my head. And the worst of it is that to all eternity I can never make any atonement."

"But God will forgive you, Charley."

"What do I care for that," he rejoined, almost fiercely, "when the little bird cannot forgive me?—I would go on my knees to the little bird, if I could, to beg its pardon and tell it what a brute I was, and it might shoot me if it would, and I should say 'Thank you.'"

He laughed almost hysterically, and the tears ran down his face.

I have said little about my uncle's teaching, lest I should bore my readers. But there it came in, and therefore here it must come in. My uncle had, by no positive instruction, but by occasional observations, not one of which I can recall, generated in me a strong hope that the life of the lower animals was terminated at their

death no more than our own. The man who believes that thought is the result of brain, and not the growth of an unknown seed whose soil is the brain, may well sneer at this, for he is to himself but a peck of dust that has to be eaten by the devouring jaws of Time; but I cannot see how the man who believes in soul at all, can say that the spirit of a man lives, and that the spirit of his horse dies. I do not profess to believe anything *for certain sure* myself, but I do think that he who, if from merely philosophical considerations, believes the one, ought to believe the other as well. Much more must the theosophist believe it. But I had never felt the need of the doctrine until I beheld the misery of Charley over the memory of the dead sparrow. Surely that sparrow fell not to the ground without the Father's knowledge.

"Charley! how do you know," I said, "that you can never beg the bird's pardon? If God made the bird, do you fancy with your gun you could destroy the making of his hand? If he said, 'Let there be,' do you suppose you could say, 'There shall not be'?" (Mr. Forest had read that chapter of first things at morning prayers.)

"I fancy myself that for God to put a bird all in the power of a silly thoughtless boy——"

"Not thoughtless! not thoughtless! There is the misery!" said Charley.

But I went on—

"—would be worse than for you to shoot it."

A great glow of something I dare not attempt to define grew upon Charley's face. It was like what I saw on it when Clara laid her hand on his. But presently it died out again, and he sighed—

"If there *were* a God—that is, if I were sure there was a God, Wilfrid!"

I could not answer. How could I? *I* had never seen God, as the old story says Moses did on the clouded mountain. All I could return was,

"Suppose there should be a God, Charley!—Mightn't there be a God!"

"I don't know," he returned. "How should *I* know whether there *might* be a God?"

"But *may* there not be a *might be?*" I rejoined.

"There may be. How should I say the other thing?" said Charley.

I do not mean this was exactly what he or I said. Unable to recall the words themselves, I put the sense of the thing in as clear a shape as I can.

We were seated upon a stone in the bed of the stream, off which the sun had melted the ice. The bank rose above us, but not far. I thought I heard a footstep. I jumped up, but saw no one. I ran a good way up the stream to a place where I could climb the bank; but then saw no one. The footstep, real or imagined, broke our conversation at that point, and we did not resume it. All that followed was—

"If I were the sparrow, Charley, I would not only forgive you, but haunt you for ever out of gratitude that you were sorry you had killed me."

"Then you *do* forgive me for frightening you?" he said eagerly.

Very likely Charley and I resembled each other too much to be the best possible companions for each other. There was, however, this difference between us—that he had been bored with religion and I had not. In other

words, food had been forced upon him, which had only been laid before me.

We rose and went home. A few minutes after our entrance, Mr. Forest came in—looking strange, I thought. The conviction crossed my mind that it was his footstep we had heard over our heads as we sat in the channel of the frozen stream. I have reason to think that he followed us for a chance of listening. Something had set him on the watch—most likely the fact that we were so much together, and did not care for the society of the rest of our schoolfellows. From that time, certainly, he regarded Charley and myself with a suspicious gloom. We felt it, but beyond talking to each other about it, and conjecturing its cause, we could do nothing. It made Charley very unhappy at times, deepening the shadow which brooded over his mind; for his moral skin was as sensitive to changes in the moral atmosphere as the most sensitive of plants to those in the physical. But unhealthy conditions in the smallest communities cannot last long without generating vapours which result in some kind of outburst.

The other boys, naturally enough, were dis-

pleased with us for holding so much together. They attributed it to some fancy of superiority, whereas there was nothing in it beyond the simplest preference for each other's society. We were alike enough to understand each other, and unlike enough to interest and aid each other. Besides, we did not care much for the sports in which boys usually explode their superfluous energy. I preferred a walk and a talk with Charley to anything else.

I may here mention that these talks had nearly cured me of castle-building. To spin yarns for Charley's delectation would have been absurd. He cared for nothing but the truth. And yet he could never assure himself that anything was true. The more likely a thing looked to be true, the more anxious was he that it should be unassailable; and his fertile mind would in as many moments throw a score of objections at it, looking after each with eager eyes as if pleading for a refutation. It was the very love of what was good that generated in him doubt and anxiety.

When our schoolfellows perceived that Mr. Forest also was dissatisfied with us, their dis-

pleasure grew to indignation; and we did not endure its manifestations without a feeling of reflex defiance.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXPLOSION.

ONE Spring morning we had got up early and sauntered out together. I remember perfectly what our talk was about. Charley had started the question: "How could it be just to harden Pharaoh's heart and then punish him for what came of it?" I who had been brought up without any superstitious reverence for the Bible, suggested that the narrator of the story might be accountable for the contradiction, and simply that it was not true that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Strange to say, Charley was rather shocked at this. He had as yet received the dogma of the infallibility of the Bible without thinking enough about it to question it. Nor did it now occur

to him what a small affair it was to find a book fallible, compared with finding the God of whom the book spoke fallible upon its testimony—for such was surely the dilemma. Men have been able to exist without a Bible: if there be a God it must be in and through Him that all men live; only if he be not true, then in him, and not in the first Adam, all men die.

We were talking away about this, no doubt after a sufficiently crude manner, as we approached the house, unaware that we had lingered too long. The boys were coming out from breakfast for a game before school.

Amongst them was one of the name of Home, who considered himself superior, from his connection with the Scotch Homes. He was a big, strong, pale-faced, handsome boy, with the least bit of a sneer always hovering upon his upper lip. Charley was half a head shorter than he, and I was half a head shorter than Charley. As we passed him, he said aloud, addressing the boy next him—

"There they go—a pair of sneaks!"

Charley turned upon him at once, his face in a glow.

"Home," he said, "no gentleman would say so."

"And why not?" said Home, turning and striding up to Charley in a magnificent manner.

"Because there is no ground for the assertion," said Charley.

"Then you mean to say I am a liar?"

"I mean to say," returned Charley, with more promptitude than I could have expected of him, "that if you are a gentleman, you will be sorry for it."

"There is my apology, then!" said Home, and struck Charley a blow on the head which laid him on the ground. I believe he repented it the moment he had done it.

I caught one glimpse of the blood pouring over the transparent blue-veined skin, and rushed at Home in a transport of fury.

I never was brave one step beyond being able to do what must be done and bear what must be borne; and now it was not courage that inspired me, but a righteous wrath.

I did my best, got a good many hard blows, and planted not one in return, for I had never

fought in my life. I do believe Home spared me, conscious of wrong. Meantime some of them had lifted Charley and carried him into the house.

Before I was thoroughly mauled, which must have been the final result, for I would not give in, the master appeared, and in a voice such as I had never heard from him before, ordered us all into the schoolroom.

"Fighting like bullies!" he said. "I thought my pupils were gentlemen at least!"

Perhaps dimly aware that he had himself given some occasion to this outbreak, and imagining in his heart a show of justice, he seized Home by the collar, and gave him a terrible cut with the riding-whip which he had caught up in his anger. Home cried out, and the same moment Charley appeared, pale as death.

"Oh, sir!" he said, laying his hand on the master's arm appealingly, "I was to blame too."

"I don't doubt it," returned Mr. Forest. "I shall settle with *you* presently. Get away!"

"Now, sir," he continued, turning to me—and held the whip suspended, as if waiting a

word from me to goad him on. He looked something else than a gentleman himself just then. It was a sudden outbreak of the beast in him.

"Will you tell me why you punish me, sir, if you please? What have I done?" I said.

His answer was such a stinging blow that for a moment I was bewildered, and everything reeled about me. But I did not cry out—I know that, for I asked two of the fellows after.

"You prate about justice!" he said. "I will let you know what justice means—to *you* at least."

And down came a second cut as bad as the first. My blood was up.

"If this is justice, then there *is* no God," I said.

He stood aghast. I went on.

"If there be a God——"

"*If* there be a God!" he shrieked, and sprang towards me.

I did not move a step.

"I hope there is," I said, as he seized me again; "for you are unjust."

I remember only a fierce succession of blows.

With Voltaire and the French revolution present to his mind in all their horror, he had been nourishing in his house a toad of the same spawn! He had been remiss, but would now compel those whom his neglect had injured to pay off his arrears! A most orthodox conclusion! but it did me little harm: it did not make me think that God was unjust, for my uncle, not Mr. Forest, was my type of Christian. The harm it did was of another sort—and to Charley, not to me.

Of course, while under the hands of the executioner, I could not observe what was going on around me. When I began to awake from the absorption of my pain and indignation, I found myself in my room. I had been ordered thither, and had mechanically obeyed. I was on my bed, staring at the door, at which I had become aware of a gentle tapping.

"Come in," I said; and Charley—who, although it was his room as much as mine, never entered when he thought I was there without knocking at the door—appeared, with the face of a dead man. Sore as I was, I jumped up.

"The brute has not been thrashing *you*,

Charley!" I cried, in a wrath that gave me the strength of a giant. With that terrible bruise above his temple from Home's fist, none but a devil could have dared to lay hands upon him!

"No, Wilfrid," he answered; "no such honour for me! I am disgraced for ever!"

He hid his wan face in his thin hands.

"What do you mean, Charley?" I said. "You cannot have told a lie!"

"No, Wilfrid. But it doesn't matter now. I don't care for myself any more."

"Then, Charley, what *have* you done?"

"You are always so kind, Wilfrid!" he returned, with a hopelessness which seemed almost coldness.

"Charley," I said, "if you don't tell me what has happened——"

"Happened!" he cried. "Hasn't that man been lashing at you like a dog, and I *didn't* rush at him, and if I couldn't fight, being a milksop, then bite and kick and scratch, and take my share of it? O God!" he cried, in agony, "if I had but a chance again! But nobody ever has more than one chance in this world. He

may damn me now when he likes: I don't care!"

"Charley! Charley!" I cried; "you're as bad as Mr. Forest. Are you to say such things about God, when you know nothing of him? He may be as good a God, after all, as even we should like him to be."

"But Mr. Forest is a clergyman."

"And God was the God of Abraham before ever there was a clergyman to take his name in vain," I cried; for I was half mad with the man who had thus wounded my Charley. "*I* am content with you, Charley. You are my best and only friend. That is all nonsense about attacking Forest. What could you have done, you know? Don't talk such rubbish."

"I might have taken my share with you," said Charley, and again buried his face in his hands.

"Come, Charley," I said, and at the moment a fresh wave of manhood swept through my soul; "you and I will take our share together a hundred times yet. I have done my part now; yours will come next."

"But to think of not sharing your disgrace, Wilfrid!"

"Disgrace!" I said, drawing myself up, "where was that?"

"You've been beaten," he said.

"Every stripe was a badge of honour," I said, "for I neither deserved it nor cried out against it. I feel no disgrace."

"Well, I've missed the honour," said Charley; "but that's nothing, so you have it. But not to share your disgrace would have been mean. And it's all one; for I thought it was disgrace, and I did not share it. I am a coward for ever, Wilfrid."

"Nonsense! He never gave you a chance. *I* never thought of striking back: how should *you?*"

"I will be your slave, Wilfrid! You are *so* good, and I am *so* unworthy."

He put his arms round me, laid his head on my shoulder, and sobbed. I did what more I could to comfort him, and gradually he grew calm. At length he whispered in my ear—

"After all, Wilfrid, I do believe I was horror-

struck, and it *wasn't* cowardice pure and simple."

"I haven't a doubt of it," I said. "I love you more than ever."

"Oh, Wilfrid! I should have gone mad by this time but for you. Will you be my friend whatever happens?—Even if I should be a coward after all?"

"Indeed I will, Charley.—What do you think Forest will do next?"

We resolved not to go down until we were sent for; and then to be perfectly quiet, not speaking to any one unless we were spoken to; and at dinner we carried out our resolution.

When bed-time came, we went as usual to make our bow to Mr. Forest.

"Cumbermede," he said sternly, "you sleep in No. 5 until further orders."

"Very well, sir," I said, and went, but lingered long enough to hear the fate of Charley.

"Home," said Mr. Forest, "you go to No. 3."

That was our room.

"Home," I said, having lingered on the stairs until he appeared, "you don't bear me a grudge, do you?"

"It was my fault," said Home. "I had no

right to pitch into you. Only you're such a cool beggar! But, by Jove! I didn't think Forest would have been so unfair. If you forgive me, I'll forgive you."

"If I hadn't stood up to you, I couldn't," I returned. "I knew I hadn't a chance. Besides I hadn't any breakfast."

"I was a brute," said Home.

"Oh, I don't mind for myself; but there's Osborne! I wonder you could hit *him*."

"He shouldn't have jawed me," said Home.

"But you did first."

We had reached the door of the room which had been Home's and was now to be mine, and went in together.

"Didn't you now?" I insisted.

"Well, I did; I confess I did. And it was very plucky of him."

"Tell him that, Home," I said. "For God's sake tell him that. It will comfort him. You must be kind to him, Home. We're not so bad as Forest takes us for."

"I will," said Home.

And he kept his word.

We were never allowed to share the same

room again, and school was not what it had been to either of us.

Within a few weeks, Charley's father, to our common dismay, suddenly appeared, and the next morning took him away. What he said to Charley, I do not know. He did not take the least notice of me, and I believe would have prevented Charley from saying good-bye to me. But just as they were going, Charley left his father's side, and came up to me with a flush on his face and a flash in his eye that made him look more manly and handsome than I had ever seen him, and shook hands with me, saying—

"It's all right—isn't it, Wilfrid?"

"It *is* all right, Charley, come what will," I answered.

"Good-bye then, Wilfrid."

"Good-bye, Charley."

And so we parted.

I do not care to say one word more about the school. I continued there for another year and a half. Partly in misery, partly in growing eagerness after knowledge, I gave myself to my studies with more diligence. Mr. Forest began to be pleased with me, and I have no doubt

plumed himself on the vigorous measures by which he had nipped the bud of my infidelity. For my part I drew no nearer to him, for I could not respect or trust him after his injustice. I did my work for its own sake, uninfluenced by any desire to please him. There was, in fact, no true relation between us any more.

I communicated nothing of what had happened to my uncle, because Mr. Forest's custom was to read every letter before it left the house. But I longed for the day when I could tell the whole story to the great, simple-hearted man.

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A LINK.

BEFORE my return to England, I found that familiarity with the sights and sounds of a more magnificent nature had removed my past life to a great distance. What had interested my childhood had strangely dwindled, yet gathered a new interest from its far-off and forsaken look. So much did my past wear to me now the look of something read in a story, that I am haunted with a doubt whether I may not have communicated too much of this appearance to my description of it, although I have kept as true as my recollections would enable me. The outlines must be correct: if the colouring be unreal, it is because of the haze which hangs about the memories of the time.

The revisiting of old scenes is like walking into a mausoleum. Everything is a monument of something dead and gone. For we die daily. Happy those who daily come to life as well!

I returned with a clear conscience, for not only had I as yet escaped corruption, but for the greater part of the time at least I had worked well. If Mr. Forest's letter which I carried to my uncle contained any hint intended to my disadvantage, it certainly fell dead on his mind; for he treated me with a consideration and respect which at once charmed and humbled me.

One day as we were walking together over the fields, I told him the whole story of the loss of the weapon at Moldwarp Hall. Up to the time of my leaving for Switzerland I had shrunk from any reference to the subject, so painful was it to me, and so convinced was I that his sympathy would be confined to a compassionate smile and a few words of condolence. But glancing at his face now and then as I told the tale, I discovered more of interest in the play of his features than I had expected; and when

he learned that it was absolutely gone from me, his face flushed with what seemed anger. For some moments after I had finished he was silent. At length he said,

"It is a strange story, Wilfrid, my boy. There must be some explanation of it, however."

He then questioned me about Mr. Close, for suspicion pointed in his direction. I was in great hopes he would follow my narrative with what he knew of the sword, but he was still silent, and I could not question him, for I had long suspected that its history had to do with the secret which he wanted me to keep from myself.

The very day of my arrival I went up to my grandmother's room, which I found just as she had left it. There stood her easy chair, there her bed, there the old bureau. The room looked far less mysterious now that she was not there; but it looked painfully deserted. One thing alone was still as it were enveloped in its ancient atmosphere—the bureau. I tried to open it—with some trembling, I confess; but only the drawers below were unlocked, and in

them I found nothing but garments of old-fashioned stuffs, which I dared not touch.

But the day of childish romance was over, and life itself was too strong and fresh to allow me to brood on the past for more than an occasional half-hour. My thoughts were full of Oxford, whither my uncle had resolved I should go; and I worked hard in preparation.

"I have not much money to spare, my boy," he said; "but I have insured my life for a sum sufficient to provide for your aunt, if she should survive me; and after her death it will come to you. Of course the old house and the park, which have been in the family for more years than I can tell, will be yours at my death. A good part of the farm was once ours too, but not for these many years. I could not recommend you to keep on the farm; but I confess I should be sorry if you were to part with our own little place, although I do not doubt you might get a good sum for it from Sir Giles, to whose park it would be a desirable addition. I believe at one time, the refusal to part with our poor little vineyard of Naboth was cause of great offence, even of open feud between the great family at the

Hall and the yeomen who were your ancestors; but poor men may be as unwilling as rich to break one strand of the cord that binds them to the past. But of course when you come into the property, you will do as you see fit with your own."

"You don't think, uncle, I would sell this house, or the field it stands in, for all the Moldwarp estate? I too have my share of pride in the family, although as yet I know nothing of its history."

"Surely, Wilfrid, the feeling for one's own people who have gone before is not necessarily pride!"

"It doesn't much matter what you call it, uncle."

"Yes, it does, my boy. Either you call it by the right name or by the wrong name. If your feeling *is* pride, then I am not objecting to the name, but the thing. If your feeling is not pride, why call a good thing by a bad name? But to return to our subject: my hope is that, if I give you a good education, you will make your own way. You might, you know, let the park, as we call it, for a term of years."

"I shouldn't mind letting the park," I answered, "for a little while; but nothing should ever make me let the dear old house. What should I do if I wanted it to die in?"

The old man smiled, evidently not ill-pleased.

"What do you say to the bar?" he asked.

"I would rather not," I answered.

"Would you prefer the church?" he asked, eyeing me a little doubtfully.

"No, certainly, uncle," I answered. "I should want to be surer of a good many things before I dared teach them to other people."

"I am glad of that, my boy. The fear did cross my mind for a moment that you might be inclined to take to the church as a profession, which seems to me the worst kind of infidelity. A thousand times rather would I have you doubtful about what is to me the highest truth, than regarding it with the indifference of those who see in it only the prospect of a social position and livelihood. Have you any plan of your own?"

"I have heard," I answered, circuitously, "that many barristers have to support themselves by literary work, for years before their

own profession begin to show them favour. I should prefer going in for the writing at once."

"It must be a hard struggle either way," he replied; "but I should not leave you without something to fall back upon. Tell me what makes you think you could be an author?"

"I am afraid it is presumptuous," I answered, "but as often as I think of what I am to do, that is the first thing that occurs to me. I suppose," I added, laughing, "that the favour with which my school-fellows at Mr. Elder's used to receive my stories is to blame for it. I used to tell them by the hour together."

"Well," said my uncle, "that proves, at least, that, if you had anything to say, you might be able to say it; but I am afraid it proves nothing more."

"Nothing more, I admit. I only mentioned it to account for the notion."

"I quite understand you, my boy. Meantime, the best thing in any case will be Oxford. I will do what I can to make it an easier life for you than I found it."

Having heard nothing of Charley Osborne since he left Mr. Forest's, I went one day, very

soon after my return, to call on Mr. Elder, partly in the hope of learning something about him. I found Mrs. Elder unchanged, but could not help fancying a difference in Mr. Elder's behaviour, which, after finding I could draw nothing from him concerning Charley, I attributed to Mr. Osborne's evil report, and returned foiled and vexed. I told my uncle, with some circumstance, the whole story: explaining how, although unable to combat the doubts which occasioned Charley's unhappiness, I had yet always hung to the side of believing.

"You did right to do no more, my boy," said my uncle; "and it is clear you have been misunderstood—and ill-used besides. But every wrong will be set right some day."

My aunt showed me now far more consideration—I do not say—than she had *felt* before. A curious kind of respect mingled with her kindness, which seemed a slighter form of the observance with which she constantly regarded my uncle.

My study was pretty hard and continuous. I had no tutor to direct me or take any of the responsibility off me.

I walked to the Hall one morning to see Mrs. Wilson. She was kind, but more stiff even than before. From her I learned two things of interest. The first, which beyond measure delighted me, was, that Charley was at Oxford—had been there for a year. The second was that Clara was at school in London. Mrs. Wilson shut her mouth very primly after answering my question concerning her; and I went no further in that direction. I took no trouble to ask her concerning the relationship of which Mr. Coningham had spoken. I knew already from my uncle that it was a fact, but Mrs. Wilson did not behave in such a manner as to render me inclined to broach the subject. If she wished it to remain a secret from me, she should be allowed to imagine it such.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARLEY AT OXFORD.

I HAVE no time in this selection and combination of the parts of my story which are more especially my history, to dwell upon that portion of it which refers to my own life at Oxford. I was so much of a student of books while there, and had so little to do with any of the men except Charley, that, save as it bore upon my intellect, Oxford had little special share in what life has made of me, and may in the press of other matter be left out. Had I time, however, to set forth what I know of my own development more particularly, I could not pass over the influence of external Oxford, the architecture and general surroundings of which I recognized as affecting me more than anything I had yet met, with the exception of the Swiss

mountains, pine-woods, and rivers. It is, however, imperative to set forth the peculiar character of my relation to and intercourse with Charley, in order that what follows may be properly understood.

For no other reason than that my uncle had been there before me, I went to Corpus Christi, while Charley was at Exeter. It was some days before we met, for I had twice failed in my attempts to find him. At length, one afternoon, as I entered the quadrangle to make a third essay, there he was coming towards the gate with a companion.

When he caught sight of me, he advanced with a quick yet hesitating step—a step with a question in it: he was not quite sure of me. He was now approaching six feet in height, and of a graceful though not exactly dignified carriage. His complexion remained as pale and his eyes as blue as before. The pallor flushed and the blue sparkled as he made a few final and long strides towards me. The grasp of the hand he gave me was powerful, but broken into sudden almost quivering relaxations and compressions. I could not help fancying also that

he was using some little effort to keep his eyes steady upon mine. Altogether, I was not quite satisfied with our first meeting, and had a strong impression that, if our friendship was to be resumed, it was about to begin a new course, not building itself exactly on the old foundations, but starting afresh. He looked almost on the way to become a man of the world. Perhaps, however, the companionship he was in had something to do with this, for he was so nervously responsive, that he would unconsciously take on, for the moment, any appearance characterizing those about him.

His companion was a little taller and stouter-built than he; with a bearing and gait of conscious importance, not so marked as to be at once offensive. The upper part of his face was fine, the nose remarkably so, while the lower part was decidedly coarse, the chin too large, and the mouth having little form, except in the first movement of utterance, when an unpleasant curl took possession of the upper lip, which I afterwards interpreted as a doubt disguising itself in a sneer. There was also in his manner a degree of self-assertion which favour-

ed the same conclusion. His hands were very large, a pair of merely blanched plebeian fists, with thumbs much turned back—and altogether ungainly. He wore very tight gloves, and never shook hands when he could help it. His feet were scarcely so bad in form: still by no pretence could they be held to indicate breeding. His manner, where he wished to conciliate, was pleasing; but to me it was overbearing and unpleasant. He was the only son of Sir Giles Brotherton of Moldwarp Hall. Charley and he did not belong to the same college, but, unlike as they were, they had somehow taken to each other. I presume it was the decision of his manner that attracted the wavering nature of Charley, who, with generally active impulses, was yet always in doubt when a moment requiring action arrived.

Charley, having spoken to me, turned and introduced me to his friend. Geoffrey Brotherton merely nodded.

"We were at school together in Switzerland," said Charley.

"Yes," said Geoffrey, in a half-interrogatory, half-assenting tone.

"Till I found your card in my box, I never heard of your coming," said Charley.

"It was not my fault," I answered. "I did what I could to find out something about you, but all in vain."

"Paternal precaution, I believe," he said, with something that approached a grimace.

Now, although I had little special reason to love Mr. Osborne, and knew him to be a tyrant, I knew also that my old Charley could not have thus coolly uttered a disrespectful word of him, and I had therefore a painful though at the same time an undefined conviction that some degree of moral degeneracy must have taken place before he could express himself as now. To many, such a remark will appear absurd, but I am confident that disrespect for the preceding generation, and especially for those in it nearest to ourselves, is a sure sign of relaxing dignity, and, in any extended manifestation, an equally sure symptom of national and political decadence. My reader knows, however, that there was much to be said in excuse of Charley.

His friend sauntered away, and we went on

talking. My heart longed to rest with his for a moment on the past.

"I had a dreary time of it after you left, Charley," I said.

"Not so dreary as I had, Wilfrid, I am certain. You had at least the mountains to comfort you. Anywhere is better than at home, with a meal of Bible oil and vinegar twice a day for certain, and a wine-glassful of it now and then in between. Damnation's better than a spoony heaven. To be away from home is heaven enough for me."

"But your mother, Charley!" I ventured to say.

"My mother is an angel. I could almost be good for her sake. But I never could, I never can get near her. My father reads every letter she writes before it comes to me—I know that by the style of it; and I'm equally certain he reads every letter of mine before it reaches her."

"Is your sister at home?"

"No. She's at school at Clapham—being sand-papered into a saint, I suppose."

His mouth twitched and quivered. He was

not pleased with himself for talking as he did.

"Your father means it for the best," I said.

"I know that. He means *his* best. If I thought it *was* the best, I should cut my throat and have done with it."

"But, Charley, couldn't we do something to find out, after all?"

"Find out what, Wilfrid?"

"The best thing, you know; what we are here for."

"I'm sick of it all, Wilfrid. I've tried till I am sick of it. If you should find out anything, you can let me know. I am busy trying not to think. I find that quite enough. If I were to think, I should go mad."

"Oh, Charley! I can't bear to hear you talk like that," I exclaimed; but there was a glitter in his eye which I did not like, and which made me anxious to change the subject.—"Don't you like being here?" I asked, in sore want of something to say.

"Yes, well enough," he replied. "But I don't see what's to come of it, for I can't work. Even if my father were a millionaire, I couldn't

go on living on him. The sooner that is over, the better!"

He was looking down, and gnawing at that tremulous upper lip. I felt miserable.

"I wish we were at the same college, Charley!" I said.

"It's better as it is," he rejoined. "I should do you no good. You go in for reading, I suppose?"

"Well, I do. I mean my uncle to have the worth of his money."

Charley looked no less miserable than I felt. I saw that his conscience was speaking, and I knew he was the last in the world to succeed in excusing himself. But I understood him better than he understood himself, and believed that his idleness arose from the old unrest, the weariness of that never satisfied questioning which the least attempt at thought was sure to awaken. Once invaded by a question, Charley *must* answer it, or fail and fall into a stupor. Not an ode of Horace could he read without finding himself plunged into metaphysics. Enamoured of repose above all things, he was from every side stung to inquiry which seldom

indeed afforded what seemed solution. Hence, in part at least, it came that he had begun to study not merely how to avoid awakening the Sphinx, but by what opiates to keep her stretched supine with her lovely woman face betwixt her fierce lion-paws. This also, no doubt, had a share in his becoming the associate of Geoffrey Brotherton, from whose company, if he had been at peace with himself, he would have recoiled upon the slightest acquaintance. I am at some loss to imagine what could have made Geoffrey take such a liking to Charley; but I presume it was the confiding air characterizing all Charley's behaviour that chiefly pleased him. He seemed to look upon him with something of the tenderness a coarse man may show for a delicate Italian greyhound, fitted to be petted by a lady.

That same evening Charley came to my rooms. His manner was constrained, and yet suggested a whole tide of pent-up friendship which, but for some undeclared barrier, would have broken out and overflowed our intercourse. After this one evening, however, it was some time before I saw him again. When I called

upon him next, he was not at home, nor did he come to see me. Again I sought him, but with like failure. After a third attempt I desisted, not a little hurt, I confess, but not in the least inclined to quarrel with him. I gave myself the more diligently to my work.

And now Oxford began to do me harm. I saw so much idleness, and so much wrong of all kinds about me, that I began to consider myself a fine exception. Because I did my poor duty—no better than any honest lad must do it—I became conceited; and the manner in which Charley's new friend treated me not only increased the fault, but aided in the development of certain other stems from the same root of self-partiality. He never saluted me with other than what I regarded as a supercilious nod of the head. When I met him in company with Charley, and the latter stopped to speak to me, he would walk on without the least change of step. The indignation which this conduct aroused drove me to think as I had never thought before concerning my social position. I found it impossible to define. As I pondered, however, a certainty dawned upon

me, rather than was arrived at by me, that there was some secret connected with my descent, upon which bore the history of the watch I carried, and of the sword I had lost. On the mere possibility of something, utterly forgetful that, if the secret existed at all, it might be of a very different nature from my hopes, I began to build castles innumerable. Perceiving, of course, that one of a decayed yeoman family could stand no social comparison with the heir to a rich baronetcy, I fell back upon absurd imaginings; and what with the self-satisfaction of doing my duty, what with the vanity of my baby manhood, and what with the mystery I chose to believe in and interpret according to my desires, I was fast sliding into a moral condition contemptible indeed.

But still my heart was true to Charley. When, after late hours of hard reading, I retired at last to my bed, and allowed my thoughts to wander where they would, seldom was there a night on which they did not turn as of themselves towards the memory of our past happiness. I vowed, although Charley had forsaken me, to keep his chamber in my heart ever

empty, and closed against the entrance of another. If ever he pleased to return, he should find he had been waited for. I believe there was much of self-pity, and of self-approval as well, mingling with my regard for him; but the constancy was there notwithstanding, and I regarded the love I thus cherished for Charley as the chief saving element in my condition at the time.

One night—I cannot now recall with certainty the time or season—I only know it was night, and I was reading alone in my room—a knock came to the door, and Charley entered. I sprang from my seat and bounded to meet him.

"At last, Charley!" I exclaimed.

But he almost pushed me aside, left me to shut the door he had opened, sat down in a chair by the fire, and began gnawing the head of his cane. I resumed my seat, moved the lamp so that I could see him, and waited for him to speak. Then first I saw that his face was unnaturally pale and worn, almost even haggard. His eyes were weary, and his whole manner as of one haunted by an evil presence of which he is ever aware.

"You are an enviable fellow, Wilfrid," he said at length, with something between a groan and a laugh.

"Why do you say that, Charley?" I returned. "Why am I enviable?"

"Because you can work. I hate the very sight of a book. I am afraid I shall be plucked. I see nothing else for it. And what will the old man say? I have grace enough left to be sorry for him. But he will take it out in sour looks and silences."

"There's time enough yet. I wish you were not so far ahead of me: we might have worked together."

"I can't work, I tell you. I hate it. It will console my father, I hope, to find his prophecies concerning me come true. I've heard him abuse me to my mother."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so of your father, Charley. It's not like you. I can't bear to hear it."

"It's not like what I used to be, Wilfrid. But there's none of that left. What do you take me for—honestly now?"

He hung his head low, his eyes fixed on the

hearth-rug, not on the fire, and kept gnawing at the head of his cane.

"I don't like some of your companions," I said. "To be sure I don't know much of them."

"The less you know, the better! If there be a devil, that fellow Brotherton will hand me over to him—bodily, before long."

"Why don't you give him up?" said I.

"It's no use trying. He's got such a hold of me. Never let a man you don't know to the marrow pay even a toll-gate for you, Wilfrid."

"I am in no danger, Charley. Such people don't take to me," I said, self-righteously. "But it can't be too late to break with him. I know my uncle would—I could manage a five-pound note now, I think."

"My dear boy, if I had borrowed——. But I have let him pay for me again and again, and I don't know how to rid the obligation. But it don't signify. It's too late anyhow."

"What *have* you done, Charley? Nothing very wrong, I trust."

The lost look deepened.

"It's all over, Wilfrid," he said. "But it

don't matter. I can take to the river when I please."

"But then you know you might happen to go right through the river, Charley."

"I know what you mean," he said, with a defiant sound like nothing I had ever heard.

"Charley!" I cried, "I can't bear to hear you. You can't have changed so much already as not to trust me. I will do all I can to help you. What have you done?"

"Oh, nothing!" he rejoined, and tried to laugh: it was a dreadful failure. "But I can't bear to think of that mother of mine! I wish I could tell you all; but I can't. How Brotherton would laugh at me now! I can't be made quite like other people, Charley! *You* would never have been such a fool."

"You are more delicately made than most people, Charley—'touched to finer issues,' as Shakspere says."

"Who told you that?"

"I think a great deal about you. That is all you have left me."

"I've been a brute, Wilfrid. But you'll forgive me, I know."

"With all my heart, if you'll only put it in my power to serve you. Come, trust me, Charley, and tell me all about it. I shall not betray you."

"I'm not afraid of that," he answered, and sunk into silence once more.

I look to myself presumptuous and priggish in the memory. But I did mean truly by him. I began to question him, and by slow degrees, in broken hints, and in jets of reply, drew from him the facts. When at length he saw that I understood, he burst into tears, hid his face in his hands, and rocked himself to and fro.

"Charley! Charley! don't give in like that," I cried. "Be as sorry as you like; but don't go on as if there was no help. Who has not failed and been forgiven—in one way if not in another?"

"Who is there to forgive me? My father would not. And if he would, what difference would it make? I have done it all the same."

"But God, Charley—" I suggested, hesitating.

"What of him? If he should choose to pass a thing by and say nothing about it, that doesn't

undo it. It's all nonsense. God himself can't make it that I didn't do what I did do."

But with what truthful yet reticent words can I convey the facts of Charley's case? I am perfectly aware it would be to expose both myself and him to the laughter of men of low development who behave as if no more *self-possession* were demanded of a man than of one of the lower animals. Such might perhaps feel a certain involuntary movement of pitifulness at the fate of a woman first awaking to the consciousness that she can no more hold up her head amongst her kind: but that a youth should experience a similar sense of degradation and loss, they would regard as a degree of silliness and effeminacy below contempt, if not beyond belief. But there is a sense of personal purity belonging to the man as well as to the woman; and although I dare not say that in the most refined of masculine natures it asserts itself with the awful majesty with which it makes its presence known in the heart of a woman, the man in whom it speaks with most authority is to be found amongst the worthiest; and to a youth like Charley the result of actual offence against it

might be utter ruin. In his case, however, it was not merely a consciousness of personal defilement which followed; for, whether his companions had so schemed it or not, he supposed himself more than ordinarily guilty.

"I suppose I must marry the girl," said poor Charley with a groan.

Happily I saw at once that there might be two sides to the question, and that it was desirable to know more ere I ventured a definite reply.

I had grown up, thanks to many things, with a most real although vague adoration of women; but I was not so ignorant as to be unable to fancy it possible that Charley had been the victim. Therefore, after having managed to comfort him a little, and taken him home to his rooms, I set about endeavouring to get further information.

I will not linger over the affair—as unpleasant to myself as it can be to any of my readers. It had to be mentioned, however, not merely as explaining how I got hold of Charley again, but as affording a clue to his character, and so to his history. Not even yet can I think with-

out a gush of anger and shame of my visit to Brotherton. With what stammering confusion I succeeded at last in making him understand the nature of the information I wanted, I will not attempt to describe; nor the roar of laughter which at length burst bellowing—not from himself only, but from three or four companions as well to whom he turned and communicated the joke. The fire of jests, and proposals, and interpretations of motive which I had then to endure, seems yet to scorch my very brain at the mere recollection. From their manner and speech, I was almost convinced that they had laid a trap for Charley, whom they regarded as a simpleton, to enjoy his consequent confusion. With what I managed to find out elsewhere, I was at length satisfied, and happily succeeded in convincing Charley, that he had been the butt of his companions, and that he was far the more injured person in any possible aspect of the affair.

I shall never forget the look or the sigh of relief which proved that at last his mind had opened to the facts of the case.

"Wilfrid," he said, "you have saved me.

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We shall never be parted more. See if I am ever false to you again!"

And yet it never was as it had been. I am sure of that now.

Henceforth, however, he entirely avoided his former companions. Our old friendship was renewed. Our old talks arose again. And now that he was not alone in them, the perplexities under which he had broken down when left to encounter them by himself were not so overwhelming as to render him helpless. We read a good deal together, and Charley helped me much in the finer affairs of the classics, for his perceptions were as delicate as his feelings. He would brood over an Horatian phrase as Keats would brood over a sweet pea or a violet; the very tone in which he would repeat it would waft me from it an aroma unperceived before. When it was his turn to come to my rooms, I would watch for his arrival almost as a lover for his mistress.

For two years more our friendship grew; in which time Charley had recovered habits of diligence. I presume he said nothing at home of the renewal of his intimacy with me: I shrunk

from questioning him. As if he had been an angel who had hurt his wing and was compelled to sojourn with me for a time, I feared to bring the least shadow over his face, and indeed fell into a restless observance of his moods. I remember we read *Comus* together. How his face would glow at the impassioned praises of virtue! and how the glow would die into a grey sadness at the recollection of the near past! I could read his face like a book.

At length the time arrived when we had to part, he to study for the Bar, I to remain at Oxford another year, still looking forward to a literary life.

When I commenced writing my story, I fancied myself so far removed from it that I could regard it as the story of another, capable of being viewed on all sides, and conjectured and speculated upon. And so I found it as long as the regions of childhood and youth detained me. But as I approach the middle scenes, I begin to fear the revival of the old torture; that, from the dispassionate reviewer, I may become once again the suffering actor.

Long ago I read a strange story of a man condemned at periods unforeseen to act again, and yet again, in absolute verisimilitude each of the scenes of his former life: I have a feeling as if I too might glide from the present into the past without a sign to warn me of the coming transition.

One word more ere I pass to the middle events, those for the sake of which the beginning is and the end shall be recorded. It is this—that I am under endless obligations to Charley for opening my eyes at this time to my overweening estimate of myself. Not that he spoke—Charley could never have reproved even a child. But I could tell almost any sudden feeling that passed through him. His face betrayed it. What he felt about me I saw at once. From the signs of his mind, I often recognised the character of what was in my own; and thus seeing myself through him, I gathered reason to be ashamed; while the refinement of his criticism, the quickness of his perception, and the novelty and force of his remarks, convinced me that I could not for a moment compare with him in mental gifts. The upper

hand of influence I had over him I attribute to the greater freedom of my training, and the enlarged ideas which had led my uncle to avoid enthralling me to his notions. He believed the truth could afford to wait until I was capable of seeing it for myself; and that the best embodiments of truth are but bonds and fetters to him who cannot accept them as such. When I could not agree with him, he would say with one of his fine smiles, "We'll drop it, then, Willie. I don't believe you have caught my meaning. If I am right, you will see it some day, and there's no hurry." How could it be but Charley and I should be different, seeing we had fared so differently! But, alas! my knowledge of his character is chiefly the result of after-thought.

I do not mean this manuscript to be read until after my death; and even then—although partly from habit, partly that I dare not trust myself to any other form of utterance, I write as if for publication—even then, I say, only by one. I am about to write what I should not die in peace if I thought she would never know; but which I dare not seek to tell her

now for the risk of being misunderstood. I thank God for that blessed invention, Death, which of itself must set many things right, and gives a man a chance of justifying himself where he would not have been heard while alive. Lest my manuscript should fall into other hands, I have taken care that not a single name in it should contain even a side look or hint at the true one; but she will be able to understand the real person in every case.

CHAPTER V.

MY WHITE MARE.

I PASSED my final examinations with credit, if not with honour. It was not yet clearly determined what I should do next. My goal was London, but I was unwilling to go thither empty-handed. I had been thinking as well as reading a good deal; a late experience had stimulated my imagination; and at spare moments I had been writing a tale. It had grown to be a considerable mass of manuscript, and I was anxious, before going, to finish it. Hence, therefore, I returned home with the intention of remaining there quietly for a few months before setting out to seek my fortune.

Whether my uncle in his heart quite favoured the plan, I have my doubts, but it would

have been quite inconsistent with his usual grand treatment of me to oppose anything not wrong on which I had set my heart. Finding now that I took less exercise than he thought desirable, and kept myself too much to my room, he gave me a fresh proof of his unvarying kindness. He bought me a small grey mare of strength and speed. Her lineage was unknown; but her small head, broad fine chest, and clean limbs indicated Arab blood at no great remove. Upon her I used to gallop over the fields, or saunter along the lanes, dreaming and inventing.

And now certain feelings, too deeply rooted in my nature for my memory to recognize their beginnings, began to assume colour and condensed form, as if about to burst into some kind of blossom. Thanks to my education and love of study, also to a self-respect undefined yet restraining, nothing had occurred to wrong them. In my heart of hearts I worshipped the idea of womanhood. I thank Heaven, if ever I do thank for anything, that I still worship thus. Alas! how many have put on the acolyte's robe in the same temple, who have ere long cast

dirt upon the statue of their divinity, *then* dragged her as defiled from her lofty pedestal, and left her lying dishonoured at its foot! Instead of feeding with holy oil the lamp of the higher instinct, which would glorify and purify the lower, they feed the fire of the lower with vile fuel, which sends up its stinging smoke to becloud and blot the higher.

One lovely Spring morning, the buds half out, and the wind blowing fresh and strong, the white clouds scudding across a blue gulf of sky, and the tall trees far away swinging as of old, when they churned the wind for my childish fancy, I looked up from my book and saw it all. The gladness of nature entered into me, and my heart swelled so in my bosom that I turned with distaste from all further labour. I pushed my papers from me, and went to the window. The short grass all about was leaning away from the wind, shivering and showing its enamel. Still, as in childhood, the wind had a special power over me. In another moment I was out of the house and hastening to the farm for my mare. She neighed at the sound of my step. I saddled and bridled her, sprung on her

back, and galloped across the grass in the direction of the trees.

In a few moments I was within the lodge gates, walking my mare along the gravelled drive, and with the reins on the white curved neck before me, looking up at those lofty pines, whose lonely heads were swinging in the air like floating but fettered islands. My head had begun to feel dizzy with the ever-iterated, slow, half-circular sweep, when, just opposite the lawn stretching from a low wire fence up to the door of the steward's house, my mare shied, darted to the other side of the road, and flew across the grass. Caught thus lounging on my saddle, I was almost unseated. As soon as I had pulled her up, I turned to see what had startled her, for the impression of a white flash remained upon my mental sensorium. There, leaning on the little gate, looking much diverted, stood the loveliest creature, in a morning dress of white, which the wind was blowing about her like a cloud. She had no hat on, and her hair, as if eager to join in the merriment of the day, was flying like the ribbons of a tattered sail. A humanized Dryad!—one that had

been caught young, but in whom the forest-sap still asserted itself in wild affinities with the wind and the swaying branches, and the white clouds careering across! Could it be Clara? How could it be any other than Clara? I rode back.

I was a little short-sighted, and had to get pretty near before I could be certain; but she knew me, and waited my approach. When I came near enough to see them, I could not mistake those violet eyes.

I was now in my twentieth year, and had never been in love. Whether I now fell in love or not, I leave to my reader.

Clara was even more beautiful than her girlish loveliness had promised. "An exceeding fair forehead," to quote Sir Philip Sidney; eyes of which I have said enough; a nose more delicate than symmetrical; a mouth rather thin-lipped, but well curved; a chin rather small, I confess;—but did anyone ever from the most elaborated description acquire even an approximate idea of the face intended? Her person was lithe and graceful; she had good hands and feet; and the fairness of her skin gave her

brown hair a duskier look than belonged to itself.

Before I was yet near enough to be certain of her, I lifted my hat, and she returned the salutation with an almost familiar nod and smile.

"I am very sorry," she said, speaking first—in her old half-mocking way, "that I so nearly cost you your seat."

"It was my own carelessness," I returned. "Surely I am right in taking you for the lady who allowed me, in old times, to call her Clara? How I could ever have had the presumption I cannot imagine."

"Of course that is a familiarity not to be thought of between full-grown people like us, Mr. Cumbermede," she rejoined, and her smile became a laugh.

"Ah, you do recognize me, then?" I said, thinking her cool, but forgetting the thought the next moment.

"I guess at you. If you had been dressed as on one occasion, I should not have got so far as that."

Pleased at this merry reference to our meeting on the Wengern Alp, I was yet embarrassed

to find that nothing more suggested itself to be said. But while I was quieting my mare, which happily afforded me some pretext at the moment, another voice fell on my ear—hoarse, but breezy and pleasant.

"So, Clara, you are no sooner back to old quarters than you give a rendezvous at the garden-gate—eh, girl?"

"Rather an ill-chosen spot for the purpose, papa," she returned, laughing, "especially as the gentleman has too much to do with his horse to get off and talk to me."

"Ah! our old friend Mr. Cumbermede, I declare! Only rather more of him!" he added, laughing, as he opened the little gate in the wire fence, and coming up to me, shook hands heartily. "Delighted to see you, Mr. Cumbermede. Have you left Oxford for good?"

"Yes," I answered—"some time ago."

"And may I ask what you're turning your attention to now?"

"Well, I hardly like to confess it, but I mean to have a try at—something in the literary way."

"Plucky enough! The paths of literature are not certainly the paths of pleasantness or of

peace even—so far as ever I heard. Somebody said you were going in for the law."

"I thought there were too many lawyers already. One so often hears of barristers with nothing to do, and glad to take to the pen, that I thought it might be better to begin with what I should most probably come to at last."

"Ah! but, Mr. Cumbermede, there are other departments of the law which bring quicker returns than the bar. If you would put yourself in my hands now, you should be earning your bread at least within a couple of years or so."

"You are very kind," I returned, heartily, for he spoke as if he meant what he said; "but you see I have a leaning to the one and not to the other. I should like to have a try first, at all events."

"Well, perhaps it's better to begin by following your bent. You may find the road take a turn, though."

"Perhaps. I will go on till it does though."

While we talked, Clara had followed her father, and was now patting my mare's neck with a nice, plump, fair-fingered hand. The

creature stood with her arched neck and small head turned lovingly towards her.

"What a nice white thing you have got to ride!" she said. "I hope it is your own."

"Why do you hope that?" I asked.

"Because it's best to ride your own horse, isn't it?" she answered, looking up naïvely.

"Would *you* like to ride her? I believe she has carried a lady, though not since she came into my possession."

Instead of answering me, she looked round at her father, who stood by smiling benignantly. Her look said—

"If papa would let me."

He did not reply, but seemed waiting. I resumed.

"Are you a good horsewoman, Miss—Clara?" I said, with a feel after the recovery of old privileges.

"I must not sing my own praises, Mr.—— Wilfrid," she rejoined, "but I *have* ridden in Rotten Row, and I believe without any signal disgrace."

"Have you got a side-saddle?" I asked, dismounting.

Mr. Coningham spoke now.

"Don't you think Mr. Cumbermede's horse a little too frisky for you, Clara? I know so little about you, I can't tell what you're fit for. ——She used to ride pretty well as a girl," he added, turning to me.

"I've not forgotten that," I said. "I shall walk by her side, you know."

"Shall you?" she said, with a sly look.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "your grandfather would let me have his horse, and then we might have a gallop across the park."

"The best way," said Mr. Coningham, "will be to let the gardener take your horse, while you come in and have some lumcheon. We'll see about the mount after that. My horse has to carry me back in the evening, else I should be happy to join you. She's a fine creature, that of yours."

"She's the handiest creature!" I said—"a little skittish, but very affectionate, and has a fine mouth. Perhaps she ought to have a curb-bit for you, though, Miss Clara."

"We'll manage with the snaffle," she answered, with, I thought, another sly glance at me,

out of eyes sparkling with suppressed merriment and expectation! Her father had gone to find the gardener, and as we stood waiting for him she still stroked the mare's neck.

"Are you not afraid of taking cold," I said, "without your bonnet?"

"I never had a cold in my life," she returned.

"That is saying much. You would have me believe you are not made of the same clay as other people."

"Believe anything you like," she answered carelessly.

"Then I do believe it," I rejoined.

She looked me in the face, took her hand from the mare's neck, stepped back half-a-foot and looked round, saying—

"I wonder where that man can have got to. Oh, here he comes, and papa with him!"

We went across the trim little lawn, which lay waiting for the warmer weather to burst into a profusion of roses, and through a trellised porch entered a shadowy little hall, with heads of stags and foxes, an old-fashioned glass-doored bookcase, and hunting and riding-whips, whence we passed into a low-pitched drawing-

room, redolent of dried rose-leaves and fresh hyacinths. A little pug-dog, which seemed to have failed in swallowing some big dog's tongue, jumped up barking from the sheep-skin mat, where he lay before the fire.

"Stupid pug!" said Clara. "You never know friends from foes! I wonder where my aunt is."

She left the room. Her father had not followed us. I sat down on the sofa, and began turning over a pretty book bound in red silk, one of the first of the *annual* tribe, which lay on the table. I was deep in one of its eastern stories when; hearing a slight movement, I looked up, and there sat Clara in a low chair by the window, working at a delicate bit of lace with a needle. She looked somehow as if she had been there an hour at least. I laid down the book with some exclamation.

"What is the matter, Mr. Cumbermede?" she asked, with the slightest possible glance up from the fine meshes of her work.

"I had not the slightest idea you were in the room."

"Of course not. How could a literary man

with a *Forget-me-not* in his hand, be expected to know that a girl had come into the room?"

"Have you been at school all this time?" I asked, for the sake of avoiding a silence.

"All what time?"

"Say, since we parted in Switzerland."

"Not quite. I have been staying with an aunt for nearly a year. Have you been at college all this time?"

"At school and college. When did you come home?"

"This is not my home, but I came here yesterday."

"Don't you find the country dull after London?"

"I haven't had time yet."

"Did they give you riding lessons at school?"

"No. But my aunt took care of my morals in that respect. A girl might as well not be able to dance as ride now-a-days."

"Who rode with you in the park? Not the riding-master?"

With a slight flush on her face she retorted,

"How many more questions are you going to ask me? I should like to know, that I

may make up my mind how many of them to answer."

"Suppose we say six."

"Very well," she replied. "Now I shall answer your last question and count that the first. About nine o'clock, one——day——"

"Morning or evening?" I asked.

"Morning of course—I walked out of——the house——"

"Your aunt's house?"

"Yes, of course, my aunt's house. Do let me go on with my story. It was getting a little dark,——"

"Getting dark at nine in the morning?"

"In the evening, I said."

"I beg your pardon, I thought you said the morning."

"No, no, the evening; and of course I was a little frightened, for I was not accustomed——"

"But you were never out alone at that hour, —in London?"

"Yes, I was quite alone. I had promised to meet—a friend at the corner of—— You know that part, do you?"

"I beg your pardon. What part?"

"Oh——Mayfair. You know Mayfair, don't you?"

"You were going to meet a gentleman at the corner of Mayfair—were you?" I said, getting quite bewildered.

She jumped up, clapping her hands as gracefully as merrily, and crying—

"I wasn't going to meet any gentleman. There! Your six questions are answered. I won't answer a single other you choose to ask, unless I please, which is not in the least likely."

She made me a low half merry half mocking courtesy and left the room.

The same moment her father came in, following old Mr. Coningham, who gave me a kindly welcome, and said his horse was at my service, but he hoped I would lunch with him first. I gratefully consented, and soon luncheon was announced. Miss Coningham, Clara's aunt, was in the dining-room before us. A dry, antiquated woman, she greeted me with unexpected frankness. Lunch was half over before Clara entered —in a perfectly fitting habit, her hat on, and her skirt thrown over her arm.

"Soho, Clara!" cried her father; "you want to take us by surprise—coming out all at once a town-bred lady, eh?"

"Why, where ever did you get that riding-habit, Clara?" said her aunt.

"In my box, aunt," said Clara.

"My word, child, but your father has kept you in pocket-money!" returned Miss Coningham.

"I've got a town aunt as well as a country one," rejoined Clara, with an expression I could not quite understand, but out of which her laugh took only half the sting.

Miss Coningham reddened a little. I judged afterwards that Clara had been diplomatically allowing her just to feel what sharp claws she had for use if required.

But the effect of the change from loose white muslin to tight dark cloth was marvellous, and I was bewitched by it. So slight, yet so round, so trim, yet so pliant—she was grace itself. It seemed as if the former object of my admiration had vanished, and I had found another with such surpassing charms that the loss could not be regretted. I may just mention that the

change appeared also to bring out a certain look of determination which I now recalled as having belonged to her when a child.

"Clara!" said her father, in a very marked tone; whereupon it was Clara's turn to blush and be silent.

I started some new subject, in the airiest manner I could command. Clara recovered her composure, and I flattered myself she looked a little grateful when our eyes met. But I caught her father's eyes twinkling now and then as if from some secret source of merriment, and could not help fancying he was more amused than displeased with his daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

A RIDING LESSON.

BY the time luncheon was over, the horses had been standing some minutes at the lawn-gate, my mare with a side-saddle. We hastened to mount, Clara's eyes full of expectant frolic. I managed, as I thought, to get before her father, and had the pleasure of lifting her to the saddle. She was up ere I could feel her weight on my arm. When I gathered her again with my eyes, she was seated as calmly as if at her lace-needlework, only her eyes were sparkling. With the slightest help, she had her foot in the stirrup, and with a single movement had her skirt comfortable. I left her, to mount the horse they had brought me, and when I looked from his back, the white mare was already flashing across the boles of the trees, and Clara's

dark skirt flying out behind like the drapery of a descending goddess in an allegorical picture. With a pang of terror I fancied the mare had run away with her, and sat for a moment afraid to follow, lest the sound of my horse's feet on the turf should make her gallop the faster. But the next moment she turned in her saddle, and I saw a face alive with pleasure and confidence. As she recovered her seat, she waved her hand to me, and I put my horse to his speed. I had not gone far, however, before I perceived a fresh cause of anxiety. She was making straight for a wire fence. I had heard that horses could not see such a fence, and if Clara did not see it, or should be careless, the result would be frightful. I shouted after her, but she took no heed. Fortunately, however, there was right in front of them a gate, which I had not at first observed, into the bars of which had been wattled some brushwood. "The mare will see that," I said to myself. But the words were hardly through my mind, before I saw them fly over it like a bird.

On the other side, she pulled up, and waited for me.

Now I had never jumped a fence in my life. I did not know that my mare could do such a thing, for I had never given her the chance. I was not, and never have become what would be considered an accomplished horseman. I scarcely know a word of stable-slang. I have never followed the hounds more than twice or three times in the course of my life. Not the less am I a true lover of horses—but I have been their companion more in work than in play. I have slept for miles on horseback, but even now I have not a sure seat over a fence.

I knew nothing of the animal I rode, but I was bound, at least, to make the attempt to follow my leader. I was too inexperienced not to put him to his speed instead of going gently up to the gate; and I had a bad habit of leaning forward in my saddle, besides knowing nothing of how to incline myself backwards as the horse alighted. Hence when I found myself on the other side, it was not on my horse's back, but on my own face. I rose uninjured, except in my self-esteem. I fear I was for the moment as much disconcerted as if I had been guilty of some moral fault. Nor did it help me

much towards regaining my composure that Clara was shaking with suppressed laughter. Utterly stupid from mortification, I laid hold of my horse, which stood waiting for me beside the mare, and scrambled upon his back. But Clara, who, with all her fun, was far from being ill-natured, fancied from my silence that I was hurt. Her merriment vanished. With quite an anxious expression on her face, she drew to my side, saying—

"I hope you are not hurt?"

"Only my pride," I answered.

"Never mind that," she returned gaily. "That will soon be itself again."

"I'm not so sure," I rejoined. "To make such a fool of myself before *you!*"

"Am I such a formidable person?" she said.

"Yes," I answered. "But I never jumped a fence in my life before."

"If you had been afraid," she said, "and had pulled up, I might have despised you. As it was, I only laughed at you. Where was the harm? You shirked nothing. You followed your leader. Come along, I will give you a lesson or two before we get back."

"Thank you," I said, beginning to recover my spirits a little; "I shall be a most obedient pupil. But how did you get so clever, Clara?"

I ventured the unprotected name, and she took no notice of the liberty.

"I told you I had had a riding-master. If you are not afraid, and mind what you are told, you will always come right somehow."

"I suspect that is good advice for more than horsemanship."

"I had not the slightest intention of moralizing. I am incapable of it," she answered, in a tone of serious self-defence.

"I had as little intention of making the accusation," I rejoined. "But will you really teach me a little?"

"Most willingly. To begin, you must sit erect. You lean forward."

"Thank you. Is this better?"

"Yes, better. A little more yet. You ought to have your stirrups shorter. It is a poor affectation to ride like a trooper. Their own officers don't. You can tell any novice by his long leathers, his heels down and his toes in his

stirrups. Ride home, if you want to ride comfortably."

The phrase was new to me, but I guessed what she meant; and without dismounting, pulled my stirrup-leathers a couple of holes shorter, and thrust my feet through to the instep. She watched the whole proceeding.

"There! you look more like riding now," she said. "Let us have another canter. I will promise not to lead you over any more fences without due warning."

"And due admonition as well, I trust, Clara."

She nodded, and away we went. I had never been so proud of my mare. She showed to much advantage, with the graceful figure on her back, which she carried like a feather.

"Now there's a little fence," she said, pointing where a rail or two protected a clump of plantation. "You must mind the young wood though, or we shall get into trouble. Mind you throw yourself back a little—as you see me do."

I watched her, and following her directions, did better this time, for I got over somehow and recovered my seat.

"There! You improve," said Clara. "Now

we're pounded, unless you can jump again, and it is not quite so easy from this side."

When we alighted, I found my saddle in the proper place.

"Bravo!" she cried. "I entirely forgive your first misadventure. You do splendidly."

"I would rather you forgot it, Clara," I cried, ungallantly.

"Well, I will be generous," she returned. "Besides, I owe you something for such a charming ride. I *will* forget it."

"Thank you," I said, and drawing closer would have laid my left hand on her right.

Whether she foresaw my intention, I do not know; but in a moment she was yards away, scampering over the grass. My horse could never have overtaken hers.

By the time she drew rein and allowed me to get alongside of her once more, we were in sight of Moldwarp Hall. It stood with one corner towards us, giving the perspective of two sides at once. She stopped her mare, and said,

"There, Wilfrid! What would you give to call a place like that your own? What a thing to have a house like that to live in!"

"I know something I should like better," I said.

I assure my reader I was not so silly as to be on the point of making her an offer already. Neither did she so misunderstand me. She was very near the mark of my meaning when she rejoined—

"Do you? I don't. I suppose you would prefer being called a fine poet, or something of the sort."

I was glad she did not give me time to reply, for I had not intended to expose myself to her ridicule. She was off again at a gallop towards the Hall, straight for the less accessible of the two gates, and had scrambled the mare up to the very bell-pull and rung it before I could get near her. When the porter appeared in the wicket—

"Open the gate, Jansen," she said. "I want to see Mrs. Wilson, and I don't want to get down."

"But horses never come in here, Miss," said the man.

"I mean to make an exception in favour of this mare," she answered.

The man hesitated a moment, then retreated —but only to obey, as we understood at once by the creaking of the dry hinges, which were seldom required to move.

"You won't mind holding her for me, will you?" she said, turning to me.

I had been sitting mute with surprise both at the way in which she ordered the man, and at his obedience. But now I found my tongue.

"Don't you think, Miss Coningham," I said —for the man was within hearing, "we had better leave them both with the porter, and then we could go in together? I'm not sure that those flags, not to mention the steps, are good footing for that mare."

"Oh! you're afraid of your animal, are you?" she rejoined. "Very well."

"Shall I hold your stirrup for you?"

Before I could dismount, she had slipped off, and begun gathering up her skirt. The man came and took the horses. We entered by the open gate together.

"How can you be so cruel, Clara?" I said. "You *will* always misinterpret me! I was quite right about the flags. Don't you see how

hard they are, and how slippery therefore for iron shoes?"

"You might have seen by this time that I know quite as much about horses as you do," she returned, a little cross, I thought.

"You can ride ever so much better," I answered; "but it does not follow you know more about horses than I do. I once saw a horse have a frightful fall on just such a pavement. Besides, does one think *only* of the horse when there's an angel on his back?"

It was a silly speech, and deserved rebuke.

"I'm not in the least fond of *such* compliments," she answered.

By this time we had reached the door of Mrs. Wilson's apartment. She received us rather stiffly, even for her. After some commonplace talk, in which, without departing from facts, Clara made it appear that she had set out for the express purpose of paying Mrs. Wilson a visit, I asked if the family was at home, and finding they were not, begged leave to walk into the library.

"We'll go together," she said, apparently not

caring about a tête-à-tête with Clara. Evidently the old lady liked her as little as ever.

We left the house, and entering again by a side door, passed on our way through the little gallery, into which I had dropped from the roof.

"Look, Clara, that is where I came down," I said.

She merely nodded. But Mrs. Wilson looked very sharply, first at the one, then at the other of us. When we reached the library, I found it in the same miserable condition as before, and could not help exclaiming with some indignation,

"It *is* a shame to see such treasures mouldering there! I am confident there are many valuable books among them, getting ruined from pure neglect. I wish I knew Sir Giles. I would ask him to let me come and set them right."

"You would be choked with dust and cobwebs in an hour's time," said Clara. "Besides, I don't think Mrs. Wilson would like the proceeding."

"What do you ground that remark upon,

Miss Clara?" said the housekeeper in a dry tone.

"I thought you used them for firewood occasionally," answered Clara, with an innocent expression both of manner and voice.

The most prudent answer to such an absurd charge would have been a laugh; but Mrs. Wilson vouchsafed no reply at all, and I pretended to be too much occupied with its subject to have heard it.

After lingering a little while, during which I paid attention chiefly to Mrs. Wilson, drawing her notice to the state of several of the books, I proposed we should have a peep at the armoury. We went in, and, glancing over the walls I knew so well, I scarcely repressed an exclamation: I could not be mistaken in my own sword! There it hung, in the centre of the principal space—in the same old sheath, split half-way up from the point! To the hilt hung an ivory label with a number upon it. I suppose I made some inarticulate sound, for Clara fixed her eyes upon me. I busied myself at once with a gorgeously hilted scimitar, which hung near, for I did not wish

to talk about it then, and so escaped further remark. From the armoury we went to the picture-gallery, where I found a good many pictures had been added to the collection. They were all new and mostly brilliant in colour. I was no judge, but I could not help feeling how crude and harsh they looked beside the mellowed tints of the paintings, chiefly portraits, amongst which they had been introduced.

"Horrid!—aren't they?" said Clara, as if she divined my thoughts; but I made no direct reply, unwilling to offend Mrs. Wilson.

When we were once more on horseback, and walking across the grass, my companion was the first to speak.

"Did you ever see such daubs!" she said, making a wry face as at something sour enough to untune her nerves. "Those new pictures are simply frightful. Any one of them would give me the jaundice in a week, if it were hung in our drawing-room."

"I can't say I admire them," I returned. "And at all events they ought not to be on the same walls with those stately old ladies and gentlemen."

"Parvenus," said Clara. "Quite in their place. Pure Manchester taste—educated on calico-prints."

"If that is your opinion of the family, how do you account for their keeping everything so much in the old style? They don't seem to change anything."

"All for their own honour and glory! The place is a testimony to the antiquity of the family of which they are a shoot run to seed—and very ugly seed too! It's enough to break one's heart to think of such a glorious old place in such hands. Did you ever see young Brotherton?"

"I knew him a little at college. He's a good-looking fellow!"

"Would be if it weren't for the bad blood in him. That comes out unmistakeably. He's vulgar."

"Have you seen much of him, then?"

"Quite enough. I never heard him say anything vulgar, or saw him do anything vulgar, but vulgar he is, and vulgar is every one of the family. A man who is always aware of how rich he will be, and how good-looking he is, and

what a fine match he would make, would look vulgar lying in his coffin."

"You are positively caustic, Miss Coningham."

"If you saw their house in Cheshire! But blessings be on the place!—it's the safety-valve for Moldwarp Hall. The natural Manchester passion for novelty and luxury finds a vent there, otherwise they could not keep their hands off it; and what was best would be sure to go first. Corchester House ought to be secured to the family by Act of Parliament."

"Have you been to Corchester, then?"

"I was there for a week once."

"And how did you like it?"

"Not at all. I was not comfortable. I was always feeling too well-bred. You never saw such colours in your life. Their drawing-rooms are quite a happy family of the most quarrelsome tints."

"How ever did they come into this property?"

"They're of the breed somehow—a long way off though. Shouldn't I like to see a new claimant come up and oust them after all! They

haven't had it above five-and-twenty years or so. Wouldn't you?"

"The old man was kind to me once."

"How was that? I thought it was only through Mrs. Wilson you knew anything of them."

I told her the story of the apple.

"Well, I do rather like old Sir Giles," she said, when I had done. "There's a good deal of the rough country gentleman about him. He's a better man than his son anyhow. Sons will succeed their fathers, though, unfortunately."

"I don't care who may succeed him, if only I could get back my sword. It's too bad, with an armoury like that, to take my one little ewe-lamb from me."

Here I had another story to tell. After many interruptions in the way of questions from my listener, I ended it with these words—

"And—will you believe me?—I saw the sword hanging in that armoury this afternoon —close by that splendid hilt I pointed out to you."

"How could you tell it among so many?"

"Just as you could tell that white creature

from this brown one. I know it, hilt and scabbard, as well as a human face."

"As well as mine, for instance?"

"I am surer of it than I was of you this morning. It hasn't changed like you."

Our talk was interrupted by the appearance of a gentleman on horseback approaching us. I thought at first it was Clara's father, setting out for home, and coming to bid us good-bye; but I soon saw I was mistaken. Not, however, until he came quite close, did I recognize Geoffrey Brotherton. He took off his hat to my companion, and reined in his horse.

"Are you going to give us in charge for trespassing, Mr. Brotherton?" said Clara.

"I should be happy to *take* you in charge on any pretence, Miss Coningham. This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

Here he looked in my direction.

"Ah!" he said, lifting his eyebrows, "I thought I knew the old horse! What a nice cob *you*'ve got, Miss Coningham."

He had not chosen to recognise me, of which I was glad, for I hardly knew how to order my behaviour to him. I had forgotten nothing.

But, ill as I liked him, I was forced to confess that he had greatly improved in appearance—and manners too, notwithstanding his behaviour was as supercilious as ever to me.

"Do you call her a cob, then?" said Clara. "I should never have thought of calling her a cob.—She belongs to Mr. Cumbermede."

"Ah!" he said again, arching his eyebrows as before, and looking straight at me as if he had never seen me in his life.

I think I succeeded in looking almost unaware of his presence. At least so I tried to look, feeling quite thankful to Clara for defending my mare: to hear her called a cob was hateful to me.

After listening to a few more of his remarks upon her, made without the slightest reference to her owner, who was not three yards from her side, Clara asked him, in the easiest manner—

"Shall you be at the county ball?"

"When is that?"

"Next Thursday."

"Are you going?"

"I hope so."

"Then will you dance the first waltz with me?"

"No, Mr. Brotherton."

"Then I am sorry to say I shall be in London."

"When do you rejoin your regiment?"

"Oh! I've got a month's leave."

"Then why won't you be at the ball?"

"Because you won't promise me the first waltz."

"Well—rather than the belles of Minstercombe should—ring their sweet changes in vain, I suppose I must indulge you."

"A thousand thanks," he said, lifted his hat, and rode on.

My blood was in a cold boil—if the phrase can convey an idea. Clara rode on homewards without looking round, and I followed, keeping a few yards behind her, hardly thinking at all, my very brain seeming cold inside my skull.

There was small occasion as yet, some of my readers may think. I cannot help it—so it was. When we had gone in silence a couple of hundred yards or so, she glanced round at me with a quick sly half-look, and burst out laughing.

I was by her side in an instant: her laugh had dissolved the spell that bound me. But she spoke first.

"Well, Mr. Cumbermede?" she said, with a slow interrogation.

"Well, Miss Coningham?" I rejoined, but bitterly, I suppose.

"What's the matter?" she retorted sharply, looking up at me, full in the face, whether in real or feigned anger I could not tell.

"How could you talk *of* that fellow as you did, and then talk so *to* him?"

"What right have you to put such questions to me? I am not aware of any intimacy to justify it."

"Then I beg your pardon. But my surprise remains the same."

"Why, you silly boy!" she returned, laughing aloud, "don't you know he is, or will be, my feudal lord. I am bound to be polite to him. What would become of poor grandpapa if I were to give him offence? Besides, I have been in the house with him for a week. He's not a Crichton; but he dances well. Are *you* going to the ball?"

"I never heard of it. I have not for weeks thought of anything but—but—my writing, till this morning. Now I fear I shall find it difficult to return to it. It looks ages since I saddled the mare!"

"But if you're ever to be an author, it won't do to shut yourself up. You ought to see as much of the world as you can. I should strongly advise you to go to the ball."

"I would willingly obey you—but—but—I don't know how to get a ticket."

"Oh! if you would like to go, papa will have much pleasure in managing that. I will ask him."

"I'm much obliged to you," I returned. "I should enjoy seeing Mr. Brotherton dance."

She laughed again, but it was an oddly constrained laugh.

"It's quite time I were at home," she said, and gave the mare the rein, increasing her speed as we approached the house. Before I reached the little gate she had given her up to the gardener, who had been on the look out for us.

"Put on her own saddle, and bring the mare round at once, please," I called to the man, as

he led her and the horse away together.

"Won't you come in, Wilfrid?" said Clara, kindly and seriously.

"No, thank you," I returned; for I was full of rage and jealousy. To do myself justice, however, mingled with these was pity that such a girl should be so easy with such a man. But I could not tell her what I knew of him. Even if I *could* have done so, I dared not; for the man who shows himself jealous must be readily believed capable of lying, or at least misrepresenting.

"Then I must bid you good evening," she said, as quietly as if we had been together only five minutes. "I am *so* much obliged to you for letting me ride your mare!"

She gave me a half-friendly, half-stately little bow, and walked into the house. In a few moments the gardener returned with the mare, and I mounted and rode home in anything but a pleasant mood. Having stabled her, I roamed about the fields till it was dark, thinking for the first time in my life I preferred woods to open grass. When I went in at length I did my best to behave as if nothing had happened. My

uncle must, however, have seen that something was amiss, but he took no notice, for he never forced or even led up to confidences. I retired early to bed, and passed an hour or two of wretchedness, thinking over everything that had happened—the one moment calling her a coquette, and the next ransacking a fresh corner of my brain to find fresh excuse for her. At length I was able to arrive at the conclusion that I did not understand her, and having given in so far, I soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

I TRUST it will not be regarded as a sign of shallowness of nature that I rose in the morning comparatively calm. Clara was to me as yet only the type of general womanhood, around which the amorphous loves of my manhood had begun to gather, not the one woman whom the individual man in me had chosen and loved. How could I *love* that which I did not yet know: she was but the heroine of my objective life, as projected from me by my imagination—not the love of my being. Therefore, when the wings of sleep had fanned the motes from my brain, I was cool enough, notwithstanding an occasional tongue of indignant flame from the ashes of last night's fire, to sit down to my books, and read with tolerable attention my

morning portion of Plato. But when I turned to my novel, I found I was not master of the situation. My hero too was in love and in trouble; and after I had written a sentence and a half, I found myself experiencing the fate of Heine when he roused the Sphinx of past love by reading his own old verses:—

> Lebendig ward das Marmorbild,
> Der Stein begann zu ächzen.

In a few moments I was pacing up and down the room, eager to burn my moth-wings yet again in the old fire. And by the way, I cannot help thinking that the moths enjoy their fate, and die in ecstasies. I was, however, too shy to venture on a call that very morning: I should both feel and look foolish. But there was no more work to be done then. I hurried to the stable, saddled my mare, and set out for a gallop across the farm, but towards the high road leading to Minstercombe, in the opposite direction, that is, from the Hall, which I flattered myself was to act in a strong-minded manner. There were several fences and hedges between, but I clear-

ed them all without discomfiture. The last jump was into a lane. We, that is my mare and I, had scarcely alighted, when my ears were invaded by a shout. The voice was the least welcome I could have heard, that of Brotherton. I turned and saw him riding up the hill, with a lady by his side.

"Hillo!" he cried, almost angrily, "you don't deserve to have such a cob." (He *would* call her a cob.) "You don't know how to use her. To jump her on to the hard like that!"

It was Clara with him!—on the steady stiff old brown horse! My first impulse was to jump my mare over the opposite fence, and take no heed of them, but clearly it was not to be attempted, for the ground fell considerably on the other side. My next thought was to ride away and leave them. My third was one which some of my readers will judge Quixotic, but I have a profound reverence for the Don—and that not merely because I have so often acted as foolishly as he. This last I proceeded to carry out, and lifting my hat, rode to meet them. Taking no notice whatever of Brotherton, I addressed Clara—in what I fancied a distant and dignified

manner, which she might, if she pleased, attribute to the presence of her companion.

"Miss Coningham," I said, "will you allow me the honour of offering you my mare? She will carry you better."

"You are very kind, Mr. Cumbermede," she returned in a similar tone, but with a sparkle in her eyes. "I am greatly obliged to you. I cannot pretend to prefer old crossbones to the beautiful creature which gave me so much pleasure yesterday."

I was off and by her side in a moment, helping her to dismount. I did not even look at Brotherton, though I felt he was staring like an equestrian statue. While I shifted the saddles, Clara broke the silence, which I was in too great an inward commotion to heed, by asking—

"What is the name of your beauty, Mr. Cumbermede?"

"Lilith," I answered.

"What a pretty name! I never heard it before. Is it after any one—any public character, I mean?"

"Quite a public character," I returned—"Adam's first wife."

"I never heard he had two," she rejoined, laughing.

"The Jews say he had. She is a demon now, and the pest of married women and their babies."

"What a horrible name to give your mare!"

"The name is pretty enough. And what does it matter what the woman was, so long as she was beautiful."

"I don't quite agree with you there," she returned, with what I chose to consider a forced laugh.

By this time her saddle was firm on Lilith, and in an instant she was mounted. Brotherton moved to ride on, and the mare followed him. Clara looked back.

"You will catch us up in a moment," she said, possibly a little puzzled between us.

I was busy tightening my girths, and fumbled over the job more than was necessary. Brotherton was several yards ahead, and she was walking the mare slowly after him. I made her no answer, but mounted, and rode in the opposite direction. It was rude of course, but I did it. I could not have gone with them, and was afraid,

if I told her so, she would dismount and refuse the mare.

In a tumult of feeling I rode on without looking behind me, careless whither—how long I cannot tell, before I woke up to find I did not know where I was. I must ride on till I came to some place I knew, or met some one who could tell me. Lane led into lane, buried betwixt deep banks and lofty hedges, or passing through small woods, until I ascended a rising ground, whence I got a view of the country. At once its features began to dawn upon me: I was close to the village of Aldwick, where I had been at school, and in a few minutes I rode into its wide straggling street. Not a mark of change had passed upon it. There were the same dogs about the doors, and the same cats in the windows. The very ferns in the chinks of the old draw-well appeared the same; and the children had not grown an inch since first I drove into the place marvelling at its wondrous activity.

The sun was hot, and my horse seemed rather tired. I was in no mood to see any one, and besides had no pleasant recollections of my

last visit to Mr. Elder, so I drew up at the door of the little inn, and having sent my horse to the stable for an hour's rest and a feed of oats, went into the sanded parlour, ordered a glass of ale, and sat staring at the china shepherdesses on the chimney-piece. I see them now, the ugly things, as plainly as if that had been an hour of the happiest reflections. I thought I was miserable, but I know now that, although I was much disappointed, and everything looked dreary and uninteresting about me, I was a long way off misery. Indeed the passing vision of a neat unbonneted village girl on her way to the well was attractive enough still to make me rise and go to the window. While watching, as she wound up the long chain, for the appearance of the familiar mossy bucket, dripping diamonds, as it gleamed out of the dark well into the sudden sunlight, I heard the sound of horse's hoofs, and turned to see what kind of apparition would come. Presently it appeared, and made straight for the inn. The rider was Mr. Coningham! I drew back to escape his notice, but his quick eye had caught sight of me, for he came into the room with outstretched hand.

"We are fated to meet, Mr. Cumbermede," he said. "I only stopped to give my horse some meal and water, and had no intention of dismounting. Ale? I'll have a glass of ale too," he added, ringing the bell. "I think I'll let him have a feed, and have a mouthful of bread and cheese myself."

He went out, and had I suppose gone to see that his horse had his proper allowance of oats, for when he returned he said merrily:

"What have you done with my daughter, Mr. Cumbermede?"

"Why should you think me responsible for her, Mr. Coningham?" I asked, attempting a smile.

No doubt he detected the attempt in the smile, for he looked at me with a sharpened expression of the eyes, as he answered—still in a merry tone—

"When I saw her last, she was mounted on your horse, and you were on my father's. I find you still on my father's horse, and your own—with the lady—nowhere. Have I made out a case of suspicion?"

"It is I who have cause of complaint," I re-

turned—"who have neither lady nor mare—unless indeed you imagine I have in the case of the latter made a good exchange."

"Hardly that, I imagine, if yours is half so good as she looks. But, seriously, have you seen Clara to-day?"

I told him the facts as lightly as I could. When I had finished, he stared at me with an expression which for the moment I avoided attempting to interpret.

"On horseback with Mr. Brotherton?" he said, uttering the words as if every syllable had been separately italicized.

"You will find it as I say," I replied, feeling offended.

"My dear boy—excuse my freedom," he returned—"I am nearly three times your age—you do not imagine I doubt a hair's breadth of your statement! But—the giddy goose!—how could you be so silly? Pardon me again. Your unselfishness is positively amusing! To hand over your horse to her, and then ride away all by yourself on that—respectable stager!"

"Don't abuse the old horse," I returned. "He *is* respectable, and has been more in his day."

"Yes, yes. But for the life of me I cannot understand it. Mr. Cumberdede, I am sorry for you. I should not advise you to choose the law for a profession. The man who does not regard his own rights will hardly do for an adviser in the affairs of others."

"You were not going to consult me, Mr. Coningham, were you?" I said, now able at length to laugh without effort.

"Not quite that," he returned, also laughing. "But a right, you know, is one of the most serious things in the world."

It seemed irrelevant to the trifling character of the case. I could not understand why he should regard the affair as of such importance.

"I have been in the way of thinking," I said, "that one of the advantages of having rights was that you could part with them when you pleased. You're not bound to insist on your rights, are you?"

"Certainly you would not subject yourself to a criminal action by foregoing them, but you might suggest to your friends a commission of lunacy. I see how it is. That is your uncle all over! *He* was never a man of the world."

"You are right there, Mr. Coningham. It is the last epithet any one would give my uncle."

"And the first any one would give *me*, you imply, Mr. Cumbermede."

"I had no such intention," I answered. "That would have been rude."

"Not in the least. *I* should have taken it as a compliment. The man who does not care about his rights, depend upon it, will be made a tool of by those that do. If he is not a spoon already, he will become one. I shouldn't have *iffed* it at all if I hadn't known you."

"And you don't want to be rude to me."

"I don't. A little experience will set *you* all right; and that you are in a fair chance of getting if you push your fortune as a literary man. But I must be off. I hope we may have another chat before long."

He finished his ale, rose, bade me goodbye, and went to the stable. As soon as he was out of sight, I also mounted and rode homewards.

By the time I reached the gate of the park, my depression had nearly vanished. The comforting powers of sun and shadow, of sky and

field, of wind and motion, had restored me to myself. With a side glance at the windows of the cottage as I passed, and the glimpse of a bright figure seated in the drawing-room window, I made for the stable, and found my Lilith waiting me. Once more I shifted my saddle, and rode home, without even another glance at the window as I passed.

A day or two after, I received from Mr. Coningham a ticket for the county ball, accompanied by a kind note. I returned it at once with the excuse that I feared incapacitating myself for work by dissipation.

Henceforward I avoided the park, and did not again see Clara before leaving for London. I had a note from her, thanking me for Lilith, and reproaching me for having left her to the company of Mr. Brotherton, which I thought cool enough, seeing they had set out together without the slightest expectation of meeting me. I returned a civil answer, and there was an end of it.

I must again say for myself that it was not mere jealousy of Brotherton that led me to act as I did. I could not and would not get over

the contradiction between the way in which she had spoken *of* him, and the way in which she spoke *to* him, followed by her accompanying him in the long ride to which the state of my mare bore witness. I concluded that, although she might mean no harm, she was not truthful. To talk of a man with such contempt, and then behave to him with such frankness, appeared to me altogether unjustifiable. At the same time their mutual familiarity pointed to some foregone intimacy, in which, had I been so inclined, I might have found some excuse for her, seeing she might have altered her opinion of him, and might yet find it very difficult to alter the tone of their intercourse.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN LONDON.

MY real object being my personal history in relation to certain facts and events, I must, in order to restrain myself from that discursiveness the impulse to which is an urging of the historical as well as the artistic Satan, even run the risk of appearing to have been blind to many things going on around me which must have claimed a large place had I been writing an autobiography instead of a distinct portion of one.

I set out with my manuscript in my portmanteau, and a few pounds in my pocket, determined to cost my uncle as little as I could.

I well remember the dreariness of London, as I entered it on the top of a coach, in the closing darkness of a late Autumn afternoon. The

shops were not all yet lighted, and a drizzly rain was falling. But these outer influences hardly got beyond my mental skin, for I had written to Charley, and hoped to find him waiting for me at the coach-office. Nor was I disappointed, and in a moment all discomfort was forgotten. He took me to his chambers in the New Inn.

I found him looking better, and apparently, for him, in good spirits. It was soon arranged, at his entreaty, that for the present I should share his sitting-room, and have a bed put up for me in a closet he did not want. The next day I called upon certain publishers and left with them my manuscript. Its fate is of no consequence here, and I did not then wait to know it, but at once began to fly my feather at lower game, writing short papers and tales for the magazines. I had a little success from the first; and although the surroundings of my new abode were dreary enough, although, now and then, especially when the Winter sun shone bright into the court, I longed for one peep into space across the field that now itself lay far in the distance, I soon settled to my work,

and found the life an enjoyable one. To work beside Charley the most of the day, and go with him in the evening to some place of amusement, or to visit some of the men in chambers about us, was for the time a satisfactory mode of existence.

I soon told him the story of my little passage with Clara. During the narrative he looked uncomfortable, and indeed troubled, but as soon as he found I had given up the affair, his countenance brightened.

"I'm very glad you've got over it so well," he said.

"I think I've had a good deliverance," I returned.

He made no reply. Neither did his face reveal his thoughts, for I could not read the confused expression it bore.

That he should not fall in with my judgment, would never have surprised me, for he always hung back from condemnation, partly, I presume, from being even morbidly conscious of his own imperfections, and partly that his prolific suggestion supplied endless possibilities to explain or else perplex everything. I had

been often even annoyed by his use of the most refined invention to excuse, as I thought, behaviour the most palpably wrong. I believe now it was rather to account for it than to excuse it.

"Well, Charley," I would say in such a case, "I am sure *you* would never have done such a thing."

"I cannot guarantee my own conduct for a moment," he would answer;—or, taking the other tack, would reply: "Just for that reason I cannot believe the man would have done it."

But the oddity in the present case was that he said nothing. I should, however, have forgotten all about it, but that after some time I began to observe that as often as I alluded to Clara—which was not often—he contrived to turn the remark aside, and always without saying a syllable about her. The conclusion I came to was that, while he shrunk from condemnation, he was at the same time unwilling to disturb the present serenity of my mind by defending her conduct.

Early in the Spring, an unpleasant event occurred, of which I might have foreseen the pos-

sibility. One morning I was alone, working busily, when the door opened.

"Why, Charley—back already!" I exclaimed, going on to finish my sentence.

Receiving no answer, I looked up from my paper, and started to my feet. Mr. Osborne stood before me, scrutinizing me with severe grey eyes. I think he knew me from the first, but I was sufficiently altered to make it doubtful.

"I beg your pardon," he said coldly—"I thought these were Charles Osborne's chambers." And he turned to leave the room.

"They *are* his chambers, Mr. Osborne," I replied, recovering myself with an effort, and looking him in the face.

"My son had not informed me that he shared them with another."

"We are very old friends, Mr. Osborne."

He made no answer, but stood regarding me fixedly.

"You do not remember me, sir," I said. "I am Wilfrid Cumbermede."

"I have cause to remember you."

"Will you not sit down, sir? Charley will

be home in less than an hour—I quite expect."

Again he turned his back as if about to leave me.

"If my presence is disagreeable to you," I said, annoyed at his rudeness, "I will go."

"As you please," he answered.

I left my papers, caught up my hat, and went out of the room and the house. I said *good morning*, but he made no return.

Not until nearly eight o'clock did I re-enter. I had of course made up my mind that Charley and I must part. When I opened the door, I thought at first there was no one there. There were no lights, and the fire had burned low.

"Is that you, Wilfrid?" said Charley.

He was lying on the sofa.

"Yes, Charley," I returned.

"Come in, old fellow. The avenger of blood is not behind me," he said, in a mocking tone, as he rose and came to meet me. "I've been having such a dose of damnation—all for your sake!"

"I'm very sorry, Charley. But I think we are both to blame. Your father ought to have

been told. You see day after day went by, and—somehow—"

"Tut, tut! never mind. What *does* it matter —except that it's a disgrace to be dependent on such a man? I wish I had the courage to starve."

"He's your father, Charley. Nothing can alter that."

"That's the misery of it. And then to tell people God is their father! If he's like mine, he's done us a mighty favour in creating us! I can't say I feel grateful for it. I must turn out to-morrow."

"No, Charley. The place has no attraction for me without you, and it was yours first. Besides, I can't afford to pay so much. I will find another to-morrow. But we shall see each other often, and perhaps get through more work apart. I hope he didn't insist on your never seeing me."

"He did try it on; but there I stuck fast, threatening to vanish and scramble for my living as I best might. I told him you were a far better man than I, and did me nothing but good. But that only made the matter

worse, proving your influence over me. Let's drop it. It's no use. Let's go to the Olympic."

The next day, I looked for a lodging in Camden Town, attracted by the probable cheapness, and by the grass in the Regent's Park; and having found a decent place, took my things away while Charley was out. I had not got them, few as they were, in order in my new quarters before he made his appearance; and as long as I was there few days passed on which we did not meet.

One evening, he walked in, accompanied by a fine-looking young fellow, whom I thought I must know, and presently recognised as Home, our old school-fellow, with whom I had fought in Switzerland. We had become good friends before we parted, and Charley and he had met repeatedly since.

"What are you doing now, Home?" I asked him.

"I've just taken deacon's orders," he answered. "A friend of my father's has promised me a living. I've been hanging about quite long enough now. A fellow ought to do something for his existence."

"I can't think how a strong fellow like you can take to mumbling prayers and reading sermons," said Charley.

"It ain't nice," said Home, "but it's a very respectable profession. There are viscounts in it, and lots of honourables."

"I daresay," returned Charley, with drought. "But a nerveless creature like me, who can't even hit straight from the shoulder, would be good enough for that. A giant like you, Home!"

"Ah! by-the-by, Osborne," said Home, not in love with the prospect, and willing to turn the conversation, "I thought you were a church-calf yourself."

"Honestly, Home, I don't know whether it isn't the biggest of all big humbugs."

"Oh, but—Osborne!—it ain't the thing, you know, to talk like that of a profession adopted by so many great men fit to honour any profession," returned Home, who was not one of the brightest of mortals, and was jealous for the profession just in as much as it was destined for his own.

"Either the profession honours the men, or the men dishonour themselves," said Charley.

"I believe it claims to have been founded by a man called Jesus Christ, if such a man ever existed except in the fancy of his priesthood."

"Well, really," expostulated Home, looking, I must say, considerably shocked, "I shouldn't have expected that from the son of a clergyman!"

"I couldn't help my father. I wasn't consulted," said Charley, with an uncomfortable grin. "But, at any rate, my father fancies he believes all the story. I fancy I don't."

"Then you're an infidel, Osborne."

"Perhaps. Do you think that so very horrible?"

"Yes. I do. Tom Paine, and all the rest of them, you know!"

"Well, Home, I'll tell you one thing I think worse than being an infidel."

"What is that?"

"Taking to the church for a living."

"I don't see that."

"Either the so-called truths it advocates are things to live and die for, or they are the veriest old wives' fables going. Do you know who was the first to do what you are about now?"

"No. I can't say. I'm not up in church history yet."

"It was Judas."

I am not sure that Charley was right, but that is what he said. I was taking no part in the conversation, but listening eagerly, with a strong suspicion that Charley had been leading Home to this very point.

"A man must live," said Home.

"That's precisely what I take it Judas said: for my part I don't see it."

"Don't see what?"

"That a man must live. It would be a far more incontrovertible assertion that a man must die—and a more comfortable one, too."

"Upon my word, I don't understand you, Osborne! You make a fellow feel deuced queer with your remarks."

"At all events, you will allow that the first of them—they call them apostles, don't they?—didn't take to preaching the gospel for the sake of a living. What a satire on the whole kit of them that word *living*, so constantly in all their mouths, is! It seems to me that Messrs. Peter and Paul and Matthew, and all the rest of them,

forsook their livings for a good chance of something rather the contrary."

"Then it *was* true—what they said about you at Forest's?"

"I don't know what they said," returned Charley; "but before I would pretend to believe what I didn't,——"

"But I *do* believe it, Osborne."

"May I ask on what grounds?"

"Why—everybody does."

"That would be no reason, even if it were a fact, which it is not. You believe it, or rather, choose to think you believe it, because you've been told it. Sooner than pretend to teach what I have never learned, and be looked up to as a pattern of godliness, I would 'list in the ranks. There, at least, a man might earn an honest living."

"By Jove! You do make a fellow feel uncomfortable!" repeated Home. "You've got such a—such an uncompromising way of saying things—to use a mild expression."

"I think it's a sneaking thing to do, and unworthy of a gentleman."

"I don't see what right you've got to bully

me in that way," said Home, getting angry.

It was time to interfere.

"Charley is so afraid of being dishonest, Home," I said, "that he is rude.—You are rude now, Charley."

"I beg your pardon, Home," exclaimed Charley at once.

"Oh, never mind!" returned Home with gloomy good-nature.

"You ought to make allowance, Charley," I pursued. "When a man has been accustomed all his life to hear things spoken of in a certain way, he cannot help having certain notions to start with."

"If I thought as Osborne does," said Home, "I *would* sooner 'list than go into the church."

"I confess," I rejoined, "I do not see how any one can take orders, unless he not only loves God with all his heart, but receives the story of the New Testament as a revelation of him, precious beyond utterance. To the man who accepts it so, the calling is the noblest in the world."

The others were silent, and the conversation turned away. From whatever cause, Home did

not go into the church, but died fighting in India.

He soon left us—Charley remaining behind.

"What a hypocrite I am!" he exclaimed; —"following a profession in which I must often, if I have any practice at all, defend what I know to be wrong, and seek to turn justice from its natural course."

"But you can't always know that your judgment is right, even if it should be against your client. I heard an eminent barrister say once that he had come out of the court convinced by the arguments of the opposite counsel."

"And having gained the case?"

"That I don't know."

"He went in believing his own side anyhow, and that made it all right for him."

"I don't know that either. His private judgment was altered, but whether it was for or against his client, I do not remember. The fact, however, shows that one might do a great wrong by refusing a client whom he judged in the wrong."

"On the contrary, to refuse a brief on such grounds would be best for all concerned. Not

believing in it, you could not do your best, and might be preventing one who would believe in it from taking it up."

"The man might not get anybody to take it up."

"Then there would be little reason to expect that a jury charged under ordinary circumstances would give a verdict in his favour."

"But it would be for the barristers to constitute themselves the judges."

"Yes—of their own conduct—only that. There I am again! The finest ideas about the right thing—and going on all the same, with open eyes running my head straight into the noose! Wilfrid, I'm one of the weakest animals in creation. What if you found at last that I had been deceiving *you!* What would you say?"

"Nothing, Charley—to any one else."

"What would you say to yourself, then?"

"I don't know. I know what I should do."

"What?"

"Try to account for it, and find as many reasons as I could to justify you. That is, I

would do just as you do for every one but yourself."

He was silent—plainly from emotion, which I attributed to his pleasure at the assurance of the strength of my friendship.

"Suppose you could find none?" he said, recovering himself a little.

"I should still believe there *were* such. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*, you know."

He brightened at this.

"You *are* a friend, Wilfrid! What a strange condition mine is!—for ever feeling I could do this and that difficult thing, were it to fall in my way, and yet constantly failing in the simplest duties—even to that of common politeness. I behaved like a brute to Home. He's a fine fellow, and only wants to see a thing to do it. *I* see it well enough, and don't do it. Wilfrid, I shall come to a bad end. When it comes, mind I told you so, and blame nobody but myself. I mean what I say."

"Nonsense, Charley! It's only that you haven't active work enough, and get morbid with brooding over the germs of things."

"Oh, Wilfrid, how beautiful a life might be!

Just look at that one in the New Testament! Why shouldn't *I* be like that? *I* don't know why. I feel as if I could. But I'm not, you see—and never shall be. I'm selfish, and ill-tempered, and——"

"Charley! Charley! There never was a less selfish or better-tempered fellow in the world."

"Don't make me believe that, Wilfrid, or I shall hate the world as well as myself. It's all my hypocrisy makes you think so. Because I am ashamed of what I am, and manage to hide it pretty well, you think me a saint. That is heaping damnation on me."

"Take a pipe, Charley, and shut up. That's rubbish!" I said. I doubt much if it was what I ought to have said, but I was alarmed for the consequences of such brooding. "I wonder what the world would be like if every one considered himself acting up to his own ideal!"

"If he was acting so, then it would do the world no harm that he knew it."

"But his ideal must then be a low one, and that would do himself and everybody the worst kind of harm. The greatest men have always thought the least of themselves."

"Yes, but that was because they *were* the greatest. A man may think little of himself just for the reason that he *is* little, and can't help knowing it."

"Then it's a mercy he does know it! for most small people think much of themselves."

"But to know it—and to feel all the time you ought to be and could be something very different, and yet never get a step nearer it! That is to be miserable. Still it is a mercy to know it. There is always a last help."

I mistook what he meant, and thought it well to say no more. After smoking a pipe or two, he was quieter, and left me with a merry remark. One lovely evening in Spring, I looked from my bed-room window, and saw the red sunset burning in the thin branches of the solitary poplar that graced the few feet of garden behind the house. It drew me out to the park, where the trees were all in young leaf, each with its shadow stretching away from its foot, like its longing to reach its kind across dividing space. The grass was like my own grass at home, and I went wandering over it in all the joy of the new Spring, which comes every year to our

hearts as well as to their picture outside. The workmen were at that time busy about the unfinished botanical gardens, and I wandered thitherward, lingering about, and pondering and inventing, until the sun was long withdrawn, and the shades of night had grown very brown.

I was at length sauntering slowly home to put a few finishing touches to a paper I had been at work upon all day, when something about a young couple in front of me attracted my attention. They were walking arm in arm, talking eagerly, but so low that I heard only a murmur. I did not quicken my pace, yet was gradually gaining upon them, when suddenly the conviction started up in my mind that the gentleman was Charley. I could not mistake his back, or the stoop of his shoulders as he bent towards his companion. I was so certain of him that I turned at once from the road, and wandered away across the grass: if he did not choose to tell me about the lady, I had no right to know. But I confess to a strange trouble that he had left me out. I comforted myself, however, with the thought that perhaps

when we next met he would explain, or at least break, the silence.

After about an hour, he entered, in an excited mood, merry but uncomfortable. I tried to behave as if I knew nothing, but could not help feeling much disappointed when he left me without a word of his having had a second reason for being in the neighbourhood.

What effect the occurrence might have had, whether the cobweb veil of which I was now aware between us would have thickened to opacity or not, I cannot tell. I dare not imagine that it might. I rather hope that by degrees my love would have got the victory, and melted it away. But now came a cloud which swallowed every other in my firmament. The next morning brought a letter from my aunt, telling me that my uncle had had a stroke, as she called it, and at that moment was lying insensible. I put my affairs in order at once, and Charley saw me away by the afternoon coach.

It was a dreary journey. I loved my uncle with perfect confidence and profound veneration, a result of the faithful and open simplicity with which he had always behaved towards me.

If he were taken away, and already he might be gone, I should be lonely indeed, for on whom besides could I depend with anything like the trust which I reposed in him? For, conceitedly or not, I had always felt that Charley rather depended on me—that I had rather to take care of him than to look for counsel from him.

The weary miles rolled away. Early in the morning we reached Minstercombe. There I got a carriage, and at once continued my journey.

CHAPTER IX.

CHANGES.

I MET no one at the house-door, or in the kitchen, and walked straight up the stair to my uncle's room. The blinds were down, and the curtains were drawn, and I could but just see the figure of my aunt seated beside the bed. She rose, and, without a word of greeting, made way for me to approach the form which lay upon it stretched out straight and motionless. The conviction that I was in the presence of death seized me; but instead of the wretchedness of heart and soul which I had expected to follow the loss of my uncle, a something deeper than any will of my own asserted itself, and as it were took the matter from me. It was as if my soul avoided the sorrow of sepa-

ration by breaking with the world of material things, asserting the shadowy nature of all the visible, and choosing its part with the something which had passed away. It was as if my deeper self said to my outer consciousness: "I too am of the dead—one with them, whether they live or are no more. For a little while I am shut out from them, and surrounded with things that seem: let me gaze on the picture while it lasts; dream or no dream, let me live in it according to its laws, and await what will come next; if an awaking, it is well; if only a perfect because dreamless sleep, I shall not be able to lament the endless separation—but while I know myself, I will hope for something better." Like this, at least, was the blossom into which, under my after-brooding, the bud of that feeling broke.

I laid my hand upon my uncle's forehead. It was icy cold, just like my grannie's when my aunt had made me touch it. And I knew that my uncle was gone, that the slow tide of the eternal ocean had risen while he lay motionless within the wash of its waves, and had floated him away from the shore of our world. I took

the hand of my aunt, who stood like a statue behind me, and led her from the room.

"He is gone, aunt," I said, as calmly as I could.

She made no reply, but gently withdrew her hand from mine, and returned into the chamber. I stood a few moments irresolute, but reverence for her sorrow prevailed, and I went down the stair and seated myself by the fire. There the servant told me that my uncle had never moved since they laid him in his bed. Soon after the doctor arrived, and went upstairs; but returned in a few minutes, only to affirm the fact. I went again to the room, and found my aunt lying with her face on the bosom of the dead man. She allowed me to draw her away, but when I would have led her down, she turned aside, and sought her own chamber, where she remained for the rest of the day.

I will not linger over that miserable time. Greatly as I revered my uncle, I was not prepared to find how much he had been respected, and was astonished at the number of faces I had never seen which followed to the churchyard. Amongst them were the Coninghams,

father and son; but except by a friendly grasp of the hand, and a few words of condolence, neither interrupted the calm depression rather than grief in which I found myself. When I returned home, there was with my aunt a married sister, whom I had never seen before. Up to this time she had shown an arid despair, and been regardless of everything about her; but now she was in tears. I left them together, and wandered for hours up and down the lonely playground of my childhood, thinking of many things—most of all, how strange it was that, if there were a *hereafter* for us, we should know positively nothing concerning it; that not a whisper should cross the invisible line; that the something which had looked from its windows so lovingly should have in a moment withdrawn, by some back-way unknown either to itself or us, into a region of which all we can tell is that thence no prayers and no tears will entice it to lift for an instant again the fallen curtain, and look out once more. Why should not God, I thought, if a God there be, permit one single return to each, that so the friends left behind in the dark might be sure that death

was not the end, and so live in the world as not of the world?

When I re-entered, I found my aunt looking a little cheerful. She was even having something to eat with her sister—an elderly country-looking woman, the wife of a farmer in a distant shire. Their talk had led them back to old times, to their parents and the friends of their childhood; and the memory of the long dead had comforted her a little over the recent loss: for all true hearts death is a uniting, not a dividing power.

"I suppose you will be going back to London, Wilfrid?" said my aunt, who had already been persuaded to pay her sister a visit.

"I think I had better," I answered. "When I have a chance of publishing a book, I should like to come and write it, or at least finish it here, if you will let me."

"The place is your own, Wilfrid. Of course I shall be very glad to have you here."

"The place is yours as much as mine, aunt," I replied. "I can't bear to think that my uncle has no right over it still. I believe he has, and therefore it is yours just the same—not

to mention my own wishes in the matter."

She made no reply, and I saw that both she and her sister were shocked either at my mentioning the dead man, or at my supposing he had any earthly rights left. The next day they set out together, leaving in the house the wife of the head man at the farm, to attend to me until I should return to town. I had purposed to set out the following morning, but I found myself enjoying so much the undisturbed possession of the place, that I remained there for ten days; and when I went, it was with the intention of making it my home as soon as I might: I had grown enamoured of the solitude so congenial to labour. Before I left I arranged my uncle's papers, and in doing so found several early sketches which satisfied me that he might have distinguished himself in literature if his fate had led him thitherward.

Having given the house in charge to my aunt's deputy, Mrs. Herbert, I at length returned to my lodging in Camden Town. There I found two letters waiting me, the one announcing the serious illness of my aunt, and the other her death. The latter was two days old. I

wrote to express my sorrow, and excuse my apparent neglect, and having made a long journey to see her also laid in the earth, I returned to my old home, in order to make fresh arrangements.

CHAPTER X.

PROPOSALS.

MRS. HERBERT attended me during the forenoon, but left me after my early dinner. I made my tea for myself, and a tankard filled from a barrel of ale of my uncle's brewing, with a piece of bread and cheese, was my unvarying supper. The first night I felt very lonely, almost indeed what the Scotch call *eerie*. The place, although inseparably interwoven with my earliest recollections, drew back and stood apart from me—a thing to be thought about; and, in the ancient house, amidst the lonely field, I felt like a ghost condemned to return and live the vanished time over again. I had had a fire lighted in my own room; for, although the air was warm outside, the thick stone walls seemed to retain the chilly breath

of the last Winter. The silent rooms that filled the house forced the sense of their presence upon me. I seemed to see the forsaken things in them staring at each other, hopeless and useless, across the dividing space, as if saying to themselves, "We belong to the dead, are mouldering to the dust after them, and in the dust alone we meet." From the vacant rooms my soul seemed to float out beyond, searching still—to find nothing but loneliness and emptiness betwixt me and the stars; and beyond the stars more loneliness and more emptiness still—no rest for the sole of the foot of the wandering Psyche—save—one mighty saving—an exception which, if true, must be the one all-absorbing rule. "But," I was saying to myself, "love unknown is not even equal to love lost," when my reverie was broken by the dull noise of a horse's hoofs upon the sward. I rose and went to the window. As I crossed the room, my brain rather than myself suddenly recalled the night when my pendulum drew from the churning trees the unwelcome genius of the storm. The moment I reached the window—there through the dim Summer twilight, once more from the

trees, now as still as sleep, came the same figure.

Mr. Coningham saw me at the fire-lighted window, and halted.

"May I be admitted?" he asked ceremoniously.

I made a sign to him to ride round to the door, for I could not speak aloud: it would have been rude to the memories that haunted the silent house.

"May I come in for a few minutes, Mr. Cumbermede?" he asked again, already at the door by the time I had opened it.

"By all means, Mr. Coningham," I replied. "Only you must tie your horse to this ring, for we—I—have no stable here."

"I've done this before," he answered, as he made the animal fast. "I know the ways of the place well enough. But surely you're not here in absolute solitude?"

"Yes, I am. I prefer being alone at present."

"Very unhealthy, I must say! You will grow hypochondriacal if you mope in this fashion," he returned, following me up stairs to my room.

"A day or two of solitude now and then would, I suspect, do most people more good than harm," I answered. "But you must not think I intend leading a hermit's life. Have you heard that my aunt——?"

"Yes, yes.—You are left alone in the world. But relations are not a man's only friends—and certainly not always his best friends."

I made no reply, thinking of my uncle.

"I did not know you were down," he resumed. "I was calling at my father's, and seeing your light across the park, thought it possible you might be here, and rode over to see. May I take the liberty of asking what your plans are?" he added, seating himself by the fire.

"I have hardly had time to form new ones; but I mean to stick to my work, anyhow."

"You mean your profession?"

"Yes, if you will allow me to call it such. I have had success enough already to justify me in going on."

"I am more pleased than surprised to hear it," he answered. "But what will you do with the old nest?"

"Let the old nest wait for the old bird, Mr. Coningham—keep it to die in."

"I don't like to hear a young fellow talking that way," he remonstrated. "You've got a long life to live yet—at least I hope so. But if you leave the house untenanted till the period to which you allude, it will be quite unfit by that time even for the small service you propose to require of it. Why not let it—for a term of years? I could find you a tenant, I make no doubt."

"I won't let it. I shall meet the world all the better if I have a place of my own to take refuge in."

"Well, I can't say but there's good in that fancy. To have any spot of your own, however small—freehold, I mean—must be a comfort. At the same time, what's the world for, if you're to meet it in that half-hearted way? I don't mean that every young man—there are exceptions—must sow just so many bushels of *avena fatua*. There are plenty of enjoyments to be got without leading a wild life—which I should be the last to recommend to any young man of principle. Take my advice, and let the

place. But pray don't do me the injustice to fancy I came to look after a job. I shall be most happy to serve you."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," I answered. "If you could let the farm for me for the rest of the lease, of which there are but a few years to run, that would be of great consequence to me. Herbert, my uncle's foreman, who has the management now, is a very good fellow, but I doubt if he will do more than make both ends meet without my aunt, and the accounts would bother me endlessly."

"I shall find out whether Lord Inglewold would be inclined to resume the fag-end. In such case, as the lease has been a long one, and land has risen much, he would doubtless pay a part of the difference. Then there's the stock, worth a good deal, I should think. I'll see what can be done. And then there's the stray bit of park?"

"What do you mean by that?" I asked. "We have been in the way of calling it the *park*, though why, I never could tell. I confess it does look like a bit of Sir Giles's that had wandered beyond the gates."

"There *is* some old story or other about it, I believe. The possessors of the Moldwarp estate have, from time immemorial, regarded it as properly theirs. I know that."

"I am much obliged to them, certainly. *I* have been in the habit of thinking differently."

"Of course, of course," he rejoined, laughing. "But there may have been some—mistake somewhere. I know Sir Giles would give five times its value for it."

"He should not have it if he offered the Moldwarp estate in exchange," I cried indignantly; and the thought flashed across me that this temptation was what my uncle had feared from the acquaintance of Mr. Coningham.

"Your sincerity will not be put to so great a test as that," he returned, laughing quite merrily. "But I am glad you have such a respect for real property. At the same time—how many acres are there of it?"

"I don't know," I answered, curtly and truly.

"It's of no consequence. Only if you don't want to be tempted, don't let Sir Giles or my father broach the subject. You needn't look at

me. *I* am not Sir Giles's agent. Neither do my father and I run in double harness. He hinted, however, this very day, that he believed the old fool wouldn't stick at £500 an acre for this bit of grass—if he couldn't get it for less."

"If that is what you have come about, Mr. Coningham," I rejoined, haughtily I dare say, for something I could not well define made me feel as if the dignity of a thousand ancestors were perilled in my own, "I beg you will not say another word on the subject, for sell this land I *will not*."

He was looking at me strangely. His eye glittered with what, under other circumstances, I might have taken for satisfaction; but he turned his face away and rose, saying, with a curiously altered tone, as he took up his hat,

"I'm very sorry to have offended you, Mr. Cumbermede. I sincerely beg your pardon. I thought our old—friendship may I not call it? —would have justified me in merely reporting what I had heard. I see now that I was wrong. I ought to have shown more regard for your feelings at this trying time. But again I assure you I was only reporting, and had not

the slightest intention of making myself a go-between in the matter. One word more: I have no doubt I could *let* the field for you—at good grazing rental That I think you can hardly object to."

"I should be much obliged to you," I replied —"for a term of not more than seven years—but without the house, and with the stipulation expressly made that I have right of way in every direction through it."

"Reasonable enough," he answered.

"One thing more," I said: "all these affairs must be pure matters of business between us."

"As you please," he returned, with, I fancied, a shadow of disappointment, if not of displeasure, on his countenance. "I should have been more gratified if you had accepted a friendly office; but I will do my best for you, notwithstanding."

"I had no intention of being unfriendly, Mr. Coningham," I said. "But when I think of it, I fear I may have been rude, for the bare proposal of selling this Naboth's vineyard of mine would go far to make me rude to any man

alive. It sounds like an invitation to dishonour myself in the eyes of my ancestors."

"Ah! you do care about your ancestors?" he said half musingly, and looking into his hat.

"Of course I do. Who is there does not?"

"Only some ninety-nine hundredths of the English nation."

"I cannot well forget," I returned, "what my ancestors have done for me."

"Whereas most people only remember that their ancestors can do no more for them. I declare I am almost glad I offended you. It does one good to hear a young man speak like that in these degenerate days, when a buck would rather be the son of a rich brewer than a decayed gentleman. I will call again about the end of the week—that is if you will be here—and report progress."

His manner, as he took his leave, was at once more friendly and more respectful than it had yet been—a change which I attributed to his having discovered in me more firmness than he had expected, in regard, if not of my rights, at least of my social position.

CHAPTER XI.

ARRANGEMENTS.

MY custom at this time, and for long after I had finally settled down in the country, was to rise early in the morning—often, as I used when a child, before sunrise, in order to see the first burst of the sun upon the new-born world. I believed then, as I believe still, that, lovely as the sunset is, the sunrise is more full of mystery, poetry, and even, I had almost said, pathos. But often ere he was well up I had begun to imagine what the evening would be like, and with what softly mingled, all but imperceptible gradations it would steal into night. Then, when the night came, I would wander about my little field, vainly endeavouring to picture the glory with which the next day's sun would rise upon me. Hence the

morning and evening became well known to me; and yet I shrink from saying it, for each is endless in the variety of its change. And the longer I was alone, I became the more enamoured of solitude, with the labour to which, in my case, it was so helpful; and began, indeed, to be in some danger of losing sight of my relation to "a world of men," for with that world my imagination and my love for Charley were now my sole recognizable links.

In the fore-part of the day, I read and wrote; and in the after-part found both employment and pleasure in arranging my uncle's books, amongst which I came upon a good many treasures, whereof I was now able in some measure to appreciate the value—thinking often, amidst their ancient dust and odours, with something like indignant pity, of the splendid collection, as I was sure it must be, mouldering away in utter neglect at the neighbouring Hall.

I was on my knees in the midst of a pile which I had drawn from a cupboard under the shelves, when Mrs. Herbert showed Mr. Coningham in. I was annoyed, for my uncle's room was sacred; but as I was about to take him to

my own, I saw such a look of interest upon his face that it turned me aside, and I asked him to take a seat.

"If you do not mind the dust," I said.

"Mind the dust!" he exclaimed, "—of old books! I count it almost sacred. I am glad you know how to value them."

What right had he to be glad? How did he know I valued them? How could I but value them? I rebuked my offence, however, and after a little talk about them, in which he revealed much more knowledge than I should have expected, it vanished. He then informed me of an arrangement he and Lord Inglewold's factor had been talking over in respect of the farm; also of an offer he had had for my field. I considered both sufficiently advantageous in my circumstances, and the result was that I closed with both.

A few days after this arrangement, I returned to London, intending to remain for some time. I had a warm welcome from Charley, but could not help fancying an unacknowledged something dividing us. He appeared, notwithstanding, less oppressed, and, in a word, more like other

people. I proceeded at once to finish two or three papers and stories, which late events had interrupted. But within a week London had grown to me stifling and unendurable, and I longed unspeakably for the free air of my field and the loneliness of my small castle. If my reader regard me as already a hypochondriac, the sole disproof I have to offer is, that I was then diligently writing what some years afterwards obtained a hearty reception from the better class of the reading public. Whether my habits were healthy or not, whether my love of solitude was natural or not, I cannot but hope from this that my modes of thinking were. The end was that, after finishing the work I had on hand, I collected my few belongings, gave up my lodging, bade Charley good-bye, receiving from him a promise to visit me at my own house if possible, and took my farewell of London for a season, determined not to return until I had produced a work which my now more enlarged judgment might consider fit to see the light. I had laid out all my spare money upon books, with which, in a few heavy trunks, I now went back to my solitary dwelling. I had no care

upon my mind, for my small fortune, along with the rent of my field, was more than sufficient for my maintenance in the almost anchoretic seclusion in which I intended to live, and hence I had every advantage for the more definite projection and prosecution of a work which had been gradually shaping itself in my mind for months past.

Before leaving for London, I had already spoken to a handy lad employed upon the farm, and he had kept himself free to enter my service when I should require him. He was the more necessary to me that I still had my mare Lilith, from which nothing but fate should ever part me. I had no difficulty in arranging with the new tenant for her continued accommodation at the farm; while, as Herbert still managed its affairs, the services of his wife were available as often as I required them. But my man soon made himself capable of doing everything for me, and proved himself perfectly trustworthy.

I must find a name for my place—for its own I will not write: let me call it The Moat: there were signs, plain enough to me after my return

from Oxford, that there had once been a moat about it, of which the hollow I have mentioned as the spot where I used to lie and watch for the sun's first rays, had evidently been a part. But the remains of the moat lay at a considerable distance from the house, suggesting a large area of building at some former period, proof of which, however, had entirely vanished, the house bearing every sign of a narrow completeness.

The work I had undertaken required a constantly recurring reference to books of the sixteenth century; and although I had provided as many as I thought I should need, I soon found them insufficient. My uncle's library was very large for a man in his position, but it was not by any means equally developed; and my necessities made me think often of the old library at the Hall, which might contain somewhere in its ruins every book I wanted. Not only, however, would it have been useless to go searching in the formless mass for this or that volume, but, unable to grant Sir Giles the desire of his heart in respect of my poor field, I did not care to ask of him the comparatively small favour of

being allowed to burrow in his dust-heap of literature.

I was sitting, one hot noon, almost in despair over a certain little point concerning which I could find no definite information, when Mr. Coningham called. After some business matters had been discussed, I mentioned, merely for the sake of talk, the difficulty I was in—the sole disadvantage of a residence in the country as compared with London, where the British Museum was the unfailing resort of all who required such aid as I was in want of.

"But there is the library at Moldwarp Hall," he said.

"Yes, *there* it is; but there is not *here*."

"I have no doubt Sir Giles would make you welcome to borrow what books you wanted. He is a good-natured man, Sir Giles."

I explained my reason for not troubling him.

"Besides," I added, "the library is in such absolute chaos, that I might with less loss of time run up to London, and find any volume I happened to want among the old-book-shops. You have no idea what a mess Sir Giles's books are in—scarcely two volumes of the same book

to be found even in proximity. It is one of the most painful sights I ever saw."

He said little more, but from what followed, I suspect either he or his father spoke to Sir Giles on the subject; for, one day, as I was walking past the park-gates, which I had seldom entered since my return, I saw him just within, talking to old Mr. Coningham. I saluted him in passing, and he not only returned the salutation in a friendly manner, but made a step towards me as if he wished to speak to me. I turned and approached him. He came out, and shook hands with me.

"I know who you are, Mr. Cumbermede, although I have never had the pleasure of speaking to you before," he said frankly.

"There you are mistaken, Sir Giles," I returned; "but you could hardly be expected to remember the little boy who, many years ago, having stolen one of your apples, came to you to comfort him."

He laughed heartily.

"I remember the circumstance well," he said. "And you were that unhappy culprit? Ha! ha! ha! To tell the truth, I have thought of it

many times. It was a remarkably fine thing to do."

"What! steal the apple, Sir Giles?"

"Make the instant reparation you did."

"There was no reparation in asking you to box my ears."

"It was all you could do, though."

"To ease my own conscience, it was. There is always a satisfaction, I suppose, in suffering for your sins. But I have thought a thousand times of your kindness in shaking hands with me instead. You treated me as the angels treat the repentant sinner, Sir Giles."

"Well, I certainly never thought of it in that light," he said; then, as if wishing to change the subject,—"Don't you find it lonely now your uncle is gone?" he asked.

"I miss him more than I can tell."

"A very worthy man he was—too good for this world, by all accounts."

"He's not the worse off for that now, Sir Giles, I trust."

"No; of course not," he returned quickly, with the usual shrinking from the slightest allusion to what is called the other world.—"Is there

anything I can do for you? You are a literary man, they tell me. There are a good many books of one sort and another lying at the Hall. Some of them might be of use to you. They are at your service. I am sure you are to be trusted even with mouldy books, which, from what I hear, must be a greater temptation to you now than red-cheeked apples," he added with another merry laugh.

"I will tell you what, Sir Giles," I answered. "It has often grieved me to think of the state of your library. It would be scarcely possible for me to find a book in it now. But if you would trust me, I should be delighted, in my spare hours, of which I can command a good many, to put the whole in order for you."

"I should be under the greatest obligation. I have always intended having some capable man down from London to arrange it. I am no great reader myself, but I have the highest respect for a good library. It ought never to have got into the condition in which I found it."

"The books are fast going to ruin, I fear."

"Are they indeed?" he exclaimed, with some

consternation. "I was not in the least aware of that. I thought so long as I let no one meddle with them, they were safe enough."

"The law of the moth and rust holds with books as well as other unused things," I answered.

"Then, pray, my dear sir, undertake the thing at once," he said, in a tone to which the uneasiness of self-reproach gave a touch of imperiousness. "But really," he added, "it seems trespassing on your goodness much too far. Your time is valuable. Would it be a long job?"

"It would doubtless take some months; but the pleasure of seeing order dawn from confusion would itself repay me. And I *might* come upon certain books of which I am greatly in want. You will have to allow me a carpenter though, for the shelves are not half sufficient to hold the books; and I have no doubt those there are stand in need of repair."

"I have a carpenter amongst my people. Old houses want constant attention. I shall put him under your orders with pleasure. Come

and dine with me to-morrow, and we'll talk it all over."

"You are very kind," I said. "Is Mr. Brotherton at home?"

"I am sorry to say he is not."

"I heard the other day that he had sold his commission."

"Yes—six months ago. His regiment was ordered to India, and—and—his mother—— But he does not give us much of his company," added the old man. "I am sorry he is not at home, for he would have been glad to meet you."

Instead of responding, I merely made haste to accept Sir Giles's invitation. I confess I did not altogether relish having anything to do with the future property of Geoffrey Brotherton; but the attraction of the books was great, and in any case I should be under no obligation to him; neither was the nature of the service I was about to render him such as would awaken any sense of obligation in a mind like his.

I could not help recalling the sarcastic criticisms of Clara when I entered the drawing-room

of Moldwarp Hall—a long, low-ceiled room, with its walls and stools and chairs covered with tapestry, some of it the work of the needle, other some of the Gobelin loom; but although I found Lady Brotherton a common enough old lady, who showed little of the dignity of which she evidently thought much, and was more condescending to her yeoman neighbour than was agreeable, I did not at once discover ground for the severity of those remarks. Miss Brotherton, the eldest of the family, a long-necked lady, the flower of whose youth was beginning to curl at the edges, I found well-read, but whether in books or the reviews of them, I had to leave an open question as yet. Nor was I sufficiently taken with her not to feel considerably dismayed when she proffered me her assistance in arranging the library. I made no objection at the time, only hinting that the drawing up of a catalogue afterwards might be a fitter employment for her fair fingers; but I resolved to create such a fearful pother at the very beginning, that her first visit should be her last. And so I doubt not it would have fallen out, but for something else. The only other person who

dined with us was a Miss Pease—at least so I will call her—who, although the law of her existence appeared to be fetching and carrying for Lady Brotherton, was yet, in virtue of a poor-relationship, allowed an uneasy seat at the table. Her obedience was mechanically perfect. One wondered how the mere nerves of volition could act so instantaneously upon the slightest hint. I saw her more than once or twice withdraw her fork when almost at her lips, and, almost before she had laid it down, rise from her seat to obey some half-whispered, half-nodded behest. But her look was one of injured meekness and self-humbled submission. Sir Giles now and then gave her a kind or merry word, but she would reply to it with almost abject humility. Her face was grey and pinched, her eyes were very cold, and she ate as if she did not know one thing from another.

Over our wine Sir Giles introduced business. I professed myself ready, with a housemaid and carpenter at my orders when I should want them, to commence operations the following afternoon. He begged me to ask for whatever I might want, and after a little friendly chat, I took my leave,

elated with the prospect of the work before me. About three o'clock the next afternoon I took my way to the Hall, to assume the temporary office of creative librarian.

CHAPTER XII.

PREPARATIONS.

IT was a lovely afternoon, the air hot, and the shadows of the trees dark upon the green grass. The clear sun was shining sideways on the little oriel window of one of the rooms in which my labour awaited me. Never have I seen a picture of more stately repose than the huge pile of building presented, while the curious vane on the central square tower glittered like the outburning flame of its hidden life. The only objection I could find to it was that it stood isolated from its own park, although the portion next it was kept as trim as the smoothest lawn. There was not a door anywhere to be seen, except the two gateway entrances, and not a window upon the ground-floor. All the doors and low windows were

either within the courts, or opened on the garden, which, with its terraced walks and avenues and one tiny lawn, surrounded the two further sides of the house, and was itself enclosed by walls.

I knew the readiest way to the library well enough : once admitted to the outer gate, I had no occasion to trouble the servants. The rooms containing the books were amongst the bedrooms, and after crossing the great hall, I had to turn my back on the stair which led to the ball-room and drawing-room, and ascend another to the left, so that I could come and go with little chance of meeting any of the family.

The rooms, I have said, were six, none of them of any great size, and all ill-fitted for the purpose. In fact, there was such a sense of confinement about the whole arrangement as gave me the feeling that any difficult book read there would be unintelligible. Order, however, is only another kind of light, and would do much to destroy the impression. Having with practical intent surveyed the situation, I saw there was no space for action. I must have at least the temporary use of another room.

Observing that the last of the suite of book-rooms furthest from the armoury had still a door into the room beyond, I proceeded to try it, thinking to know at a glance whether it would suit me, and whether it was likely to be yielded for my purpose. It opened, and, to my dismay, there stood Clara Coningham, fastening her collar. She looked sharply round, and made a half-indignant step towards me.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, Miss Coningham," I exclaimed. "Will you allow me to explain, or must I retreat unheard?"

I was vexed indeed, for, notwithstanding a certain flutter at the heart, I had no wish to renew my acquaintance with her.

"There must be some fatality about the place, Mr. Cumbermede!' she said, almost with her old merry laugh. "It frightens me."

"Precisely my own feeling, Miss Coningham. I had no idea you were in the neighbourhood."

"I cannot say so much as that, for I had heard you were at The Moat; but I had no expectation of seeing you—least of all in this house. I suppose you are on the scent of some

musty old book or other," she added, approaching the door, where I stood with the handle in my hand.

"My object is an invasion rather than a hunt," I said, drawing back that she might enter.

"Just as it was the last time you and I were here!" she went on, with scarcely a pause, and as easily as if there had never been any misunderstanding between us.

I had thought myself beyond any further influence from her fascinations, but when I looked in her beautiful face, and heard her allude to the past with so much friendliness, and such apparent unconsciousness of any reason for forgetting it, a tremor ran through me from head to foot. I mastered myself sufficiently to reply, however.

"It is the last time you will see it so," I said; "for here stands the Hercules of the stable—about to restore it to cleanliness, and what is of far more consequence in a library—to order."

"You don't mean it!" she exclaimed with genuine surprise. "I'm so glad I'm here!"

"Are you on a visit, then?"

"Indeed I am; though how it came about I

don't know. I daresay my father does. Lady Brotherton has invited me, stiffly of course, to spend a few weeks during their stay. Sir Giles must be in it: I believe I am rather a favourite with the good old man. But I have another fancy: my grandfather is getting old; I suspect my father has been making himself useful, and this invitation is an acknowledgment. Men always buttress their ill-built dignities by keeping poor women in the dark; by which means you drive us to infinite conjecture. That is how we come to be so much cleverer than you at putting two and two together, and making five."

"But," I ventured to remark, "under such circumstances, you will hardly enjoy your visit."

"Oh! shan't I? I shall get fun enough out of it for that. They are—all but Sir Giles—they are great fun. Of course they don't treat me as an equal, but I take it out in amusement. You will find you have to do the same."

"Not I. I have nothing to do with them. I am here as a skilled workman—one whose work is his sufficient reward. There is nothing de-

grading in that—is there? If I thought there was, of course I shouldn't come."

"You *never* did anything you felt degrading?"

"No."

"Happy mortal!" she said, with a sigh—whether humorous or real, I could not tell.

"I have had no occasion," I returned.

"And yet, as I hear, you have made your mark in literature?"

"Who says that? I should not."

"Never mind," she rejoined, with, as I fancied, the look of having said more than she ought. "But," she added, "I wish you would tell me in what periodicals you write."

"You must excuse me. I do not wish to be first known in connection with fugitive things. When first I publish a book, you may be assured my name will be on the title-page. Meantime, I must fulfil the conditions of my *entrée*."

"And I must go and pay my respects to Lady Brotherton. I have only just arrived."

"Won't you find it dull? There's nobody of man-kind at home but Sir Giles."

"You are unjust. If Mr. Brotherton had

been here, I shouldn't have come. I find him troublesome."

I thought she blushed, notwithstanding the air of freedom with which she spoke.

"If he should come into the property to-morrow," she went on, "I fear you would have little chance of completing your work."

"If he came into the property this day six months, I fear he would find it unfinished. Certainly what was to do should remain undone."

"Don't be too sure of that. He might win you over. He can talk."

"I should not be so readily pleased as another might."

She bent towards me, and said in an almost hissing whisper—

"Wilfrid, I hate him!"

I started. She looked what she said. The blood shot to my heart, and again rushed to my face. But suddenly she retreated into her own room, and noiselessly closed the door. The same moment I heard that of a further room open, and presently Miss Brotherton peeped in.

"How do you do, Mr. Cumbermede?" she said. "You are already hard at work, I see."

I was, in fact, doing nothing. I explained that I could not make a commencement without the use of another room.

"I will send the housekeeper, and you can arrange with her," she said, and left me.

"In a few minutes Mrs. Wilson entered. Her manner was more stiff and formal than ever. We shook hands in a rather limp fashion.

"You've got your will at last, Mr. Cumbermede," she said, "I suppose the thing's to be done!"

"It is, Mrs. Wilson, I am happy to say. Sir Giles kindly offered me the use of the library, and I took the liberty of representing to him that there was no library until the books were arranged."

"Why couldn't you take a book away with you and read it in comfort at home?"

"How could I take the book home if I couldn't find it?"

"You could find something worth reading, if that were all you wanted."

"But that is not all. I have plenty of reading."

"Then I don't see what's the good of it."

"Books are very much like people, Mrs. Wilson. There are not so many you want to know all about; but most could tell you things you don't know. I want certain books in order to question them about certain things."

"Well, all I know is, it'll be more trouble than it's worth."

"I am afraid it will—to you, Mrs. Wilson; but though I am taking a thousand times your trouble, I expect to be well repaid for it."

"I have no doubt of that. Sir Giles is a liberal gentleman."

"You don't suppose *he* is going to pay me, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Who else should?"

"Why, the books themselves, of course."

Evidently she thought I was making game of her, for she was silent.

"Will you show me which room I can have?" I said. "It must be as near this one as possible. Is the next particularly wanted?" I asked, pointing to the door which led into Clara's room.

She went to it quickly, and opened it far

enough to put her hand in and take the key from the other side, which she then inserted on my side, turned in the lock, drew out, and put in her pocket.

"That room is otherwise engaged," she said. "You must be content with one across the corridor."

"Very well—if it is not far. I should make slow work of it, if I had to carry the books a long way."

"You can have one of the footmen to help you," she said, apparently relenting.

"No, thank you," I answered. "I will have no one touch the books but myself."

"I will show you one which I think will suit your purpose," she said, leading the way.

It was nearly opposite—a bedroom, sparely furnished.

"Thank you. This will do—if you will order all the things to be piled in that corner."

She stood silent for a few moments, evidently annoyed, then turned and left the room, saying,

"I will see to it, Mr. Cumbermede."

Returning to the books and pulling off my

coat, I had soon compelled such a cloud of very ancient and smothering dust, that when Miss Brotherton again made her appearance, her figure showed dim through the thick air, as she stood—dismayed, I hoped—in the doorway. I pretended to be unaware of her presence, and went on beating and blowing, causing yet thicker volumes of solid vapour to clothe my presence. She withdrew without even an attempt at parley.

Having heaped several great piles near the door, each composed of books of nearly the same size, the first rudimentary approach to arrangement, I crossed to the other room to see what progress had been made. To my surprise and annoyance, I found nothing had been done. Determined not to have my work impeded by the remissness of the servants, and seeing I must place myself at once on a proper footing in the house, I went to the drawing-room to ascertain, if possible, where Sir Giles was. I had of course put on my coat, but having no means of ablution at hand, I must have presented a very unpresentable appearance when I entered. Lady Brotherton half rose, in

evident surprise at my intrusion, but at once resumed her seat, saying, as she turned her chair half towards the window where the other two ladies sat,

"The housekeeper will attend to you, Mr. Cumbermede—or the butler."

I could see that Clara was making some inward merriment over my appearance and reception.

"Could you tell me, Lady Brotherton," I said, "where I should be likely to find Sir Giles?"

"I can give you no information on that point," she answered, with consummate stiffness.

"I know where he is," said Clara, rising. "I will take you to him. He is in the study."

She took no heed of the glance broadly thrown at her, but approached the door.

I opened it, and followed her out of the room. As soon as we were beyond hearing, she burst out laughing.

"How dared you show your workman's face in that drawing-room?" she said. "I am afraid you have much offended her ladyship."

"I hope it is for the last time. When I am properly attended to, I shall have no occasion to trouble her."

She led me to Sir Giles's study. Except newspapers and reports of companies, there was in it nothing printed. He rose when we entered, and came towards us.

"Looking like your work already, Mr. Cumbermede?" he said, holding out his hand.

"I must not shake hands with you this time, Sir Giles," I returned. "But I am compelled to trouble you. I can't get on for want of attendance. I *must* have a little help."

I told him how things were. His rosy face grew rosier, and he rang the bell angrily. The butler answered it.

"Send Mrs. Wilson here. And I beg, Hurst, you will see that Mr. Cumbermede has every attention."

Mrs. Wilson presently made her appearance, and stood with a flushed face before her master.

"Let Mr. Cumbermede's orders be attended to *at once*, Mrs. Wilson."

"Yes, Sir Giles," she answered, and waited.

"I am greatly obliged to you for letting me know," he added, turning to me. "Pray insist upon proper attention."

"Thank you, Sir Giles. I shall not scruple."

"That will do, Mrs. Wilson. You must not let Mr. Cumbermede be hampered in his kind labours for my benefit by the idleness of my servants."

The housekeeper left the room, and after a little chat with Sir Giles, I went back to the books. Clara had followed Mrs. Wilson, partly, I suspect, for the sake of enjoying her confusion.

CHAPTER XIII.

ASSISTANCE.

I RETURNED to my solitary house as soon as the evening began to grow too dark for my work, which, from the lowness of the windows and the age of the glass, was early. All the way as I went, I was thinking of Clara. Not only had time somewhat obliterated the last impression she had made upon me, but I had, partly from the infection of Charley's manner, long ago stumbled upon various excuses for her conduct. Now I said to myself that she had certainly a look of greater sedateness than before. But her expression of dislike to Geoffrey Brotherton had more effect upon me than anything else, inasmuch as there Vanity found room for both the soles of her absurdly small

feet; and that evening, when I went wandering, after my custom, with a volume of Dante in my hand, the book remained unopened, and from the form of Clara flowed influences mingling with and gathering fresh power from those of Nature, whose feminine front now brooded over me half-withdrawn in the dim, starry night. I remember that night so well! I can recall it now with a calmness equal to its own. Indeed in my memory it seems to belong to my mind as much as to the outer world; or rather the night filled both, forming the space in which my thoughts moved, as well as the space in which the brilliant thread of the sun-lighted crescent hung clasping the earth-lighted bulk of the moon. I wandered in the grass until midnight was long by, feeling as quietly and peacefully at home as if my head had been on the pillow and my soul out in a lovely dream of cool delight. We lose much even by the good habits we form. What tender and glorious changes pass over our sleeping heads unseen! What moons rise and set in rippled seas of cloud, or behind hills of stormy vapour, while we are blind! What storms roll thundering

across the airy vault, with no eyes for their keen lightnings to dazzle, while we dream of the dead who will not speak to us! But ah! I little thought to what a dungeon of gloom this lovely night was the jasmine-grown porch!

The next morning I was glad to think that there was no wolf at my door, howling *work—work!* Moldwarp Hall drew me with redoubled attraction; and instead of waiting for the afternoon, which alone I had intended to occupy with my new undertaking, I set out to cross the park the moment I had finished my late breakfast. Nor could I conceal from myself that it was quite as much for the chance of seeing Clara now and then as from pleasure in the prospect of an ordered library that I repaired thus early to the Hall. In the morning light, however, I began to suspect, as I walked, that, although Clara's frankness was flattering, it was rather a sign that she was heart-whole towards me than that she was careless of Brotherton. I began to doubt also whether, after our first meeting, which she had carried off so well—cool even to kindness—she would care to remember that I was in the house, or

derive from it any satisfaction beyond what came of the increased chances of studying the Brothertons from a humorous point of view. Then, after all, why was she there?—and apparently on such familiar terms with a family socially so far superior to her own? The result of my cogitations was the resolution to take care of myself. But it had vanished utterly before the day was two hours older. A youth's wise talk to himself will not make him a wise man, any more than the experience of the father will serve the son's need.

I was hard at work in my shirt-sleeves, carrying an armful of books across the corridor, and thinking whether I had not better bring my servant with me in the afternoon, when Clara came out of her room.

"Here already, Wilfrid!" she exclaimed. "Why don't you have some of the servants to help you? You're doing what any one might as well do for you."

"If these were handsomely bound," I answered, "I should not so much mind; but being old and tattered, no one ought to touch them who does not love them."

"Then, I suppose, you wouldn't trust me with them either, for I cannot pretend to anything beyond a second-hand respect for them."

"What do you mean by a second-hand respect?" I asked.

"I mean such respect as comes from seeing that a scholar like you respects them."

"Then I think I could accord you a second-hand sort of trust—under my own eye, that is," I answered, laughing. "But you can scarcely leave your hostess to help me."

"I will ask Miss Brotherton to come too. She will pretend all the respect you desire."

"I made three times the necessary dust in order to frighten her away yesterday."

"Ah! that's a pity. But I shall manage to overrule her objections—that is, if you would really like two tolerably educated housemaids to help you."

"I will gladly endure one of them for the sake of the other," I replied.

"No compliments, please," she returned, and left the room.

In about half an hour she re-appeared, accom-

panied by Miss Brotherton. They were in white wrappers, with their dresses shortened a little, and their hair tucked under mob caps. Miss Brotherton looked like a lady's-maid, Clara like a lady acting a lady's-maid. I assumed the command at once, pointing out to what heaps in the other room those I had grouped in this were to be added, and giving strict injunctions as to carrying only a few at once, and laying them down with care in regularly ordered piles. Clara obeyed with a mock submission, Miss Brotherton with a reserve which heightened the impression of her dress. I was instinctively careful how I spoke to Clara, fearing to compromise her, but she seemed all at once to change her *rôle*, and began to propose, object, and even insist upon her own way, drawing from me the threat of immediate dismission from my service, at which her companion laughed with an awkwardness showing she regarded the pleasantry as a presumption. Before one o'clock, the first room was almost empty. Then the great bell rang, and Clara, coming from the auxiliary chamber, put her head in at the door.

"Won't you come to luncheon?" she said, with a sly archness, looking none the less bewitching for a smudge or two on her lovely face, or the blackness of the delicate hands which she held up like two paws for my admiration.

"In the servants' hall? Workmen don't sit down with ladies and gentlemen. Did Miss Brotherton send you to ask me?"

She shook her head.

"Then you had better come and lunch with me."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I hope you will *some* day honour my little fragment of a house. It is a curious old place," I said.

"I don't like musty old places," she replied.

"But I have heard you speak with no little admiration of the Hall: some parts of it are older than my sentry-box."

"I can't say I admire it at all as a place to live in," she answered curtly.

"But I was not asking you to live in mine," I said—foolishly arguing.

She looked annoyed, whether with herself or

me I could not tell, but instantly answered,

"Some day—when I can without—— But I must go and make myself tidy, or Miss Brotherton will be fancying I have been talking to you!"

"And what have you been doing, then?"

"Only asking you to come to lunch."

"Will you tell her that?"

"Yes—if she says anything."

"Then you *had* better make haste, and be asked no questions."

She glided away. I threw on my coat, and re-crossed the park.

But I was so eager to see again the fair face in the mob cap, that, although not at all certain of its reappearance, I told my man to go at once and bring the mare. He made haste, and by the time I had finished my dinner she was at the door. I gave her the rein, and two or three minutes brought me back to the Hall, where, having stabled her, I was at my post again, I believe, before they had finished luncheon. I had a great heap of books ready in the second room to carry into the first, and had almost concluded they would not come, when I heard their voices

—and presently they entered, but not in their mob-caps.

"What an unmerciful master you are!" said Clara, looking at the heap. "I thought you had gone home to lunch."

"I went home to dinner," I said. "I get more out of the day by dining early."

"How is that, Mr. Cumbermede?" asked Miss Brotherton, with a nearer approach to cordiality than she had yet shown.

"I think the evening the best part of the day —too good to spend in eating and drinking."

"But," said Clara, quite gravely, "are not those the chief ends of existence?"

"Your friend is satirical, Miss Brotherton," I remarked.

"At least, you are not of her opinion, to judge by the time you have taken," she returned.

"I have been back nearly an hour," I said. "Workmen don't take long over their meals."

"Well, I suppose you don't want any more of us now," said Clara. "You will arrange the books you bring from the next room upon these empty shelves, I presume?"

"No, not yet. I must not begin that until

I have cleared the very last, got it thoroughly cleaned, the shelves seen to, and others put up."

"What a tremendous labour you have undertaken, Mr. Cumbermede!" said Miss Brotherton. "I am quite ashamed you should do so much for us."

"I, on the contrary, am delighted to be of any service to Sir Giles."

"But you don't expect us to slave all day as we did in the morning?" said Clara.

"Certainly not, Miss Coningham. I am too grateful to be exacting."

"Thank you for that pretty speech. Come, then, Miss Brotherton, we must have a walk. We haven't been out of doors to-day."

"Really, Miss Coningham, I think the least we can do is to help Mr. Cumbermede to our small ability."

"Nonsense!"—(Miss Brotherton positively started at the word.) "Any two of the maids or men would serve his purpose better, if he did not affect fastidiousness. We shan't be allowed to come to-morrow if we overdo it to-day."

Miss Brotherton was evidently on the point of saying something indignant, but yielded not-

withstanding, and I was left alone once more. Again I laboured until the shadows grew thick around the gloomy walls. As I galloped home, I caught sight of my late companions coming across the park; and I trust I shall not be hardly judged if I confess that I did sit straighter in my saddle, and mind my seat better. Thus ended my second day's work at the library of Moldwarp Hall.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXPOSTULATION.

NEITHER of the ladies came to me the next morning. As far as my work was concerned, I was in considerably less need of their assistance, for it lay only between two rooms opening into each other. Nor did I feel any great disappointment, for so long as a man has something to do, expectation is pleasure enough, and will continue such for a long time. It is those who are unemployed to whom expectation becomes an agony. I went home to my solitary dinner almost resolved to return to my original plan of going only in the afternoons.

I was not thoroughly in love with Clara; but it was certainly the hope of seeing her, and not the pleasure of handling the dusty books that

drew me back to the library that afternoon. I had got rather tired of the whole affair in the morning. It was very hot, and the dust was choking, and of the volumes I opened as they passed through my hands, not one was of the slightest interest to me. But for the chance of seeing Clara I should have lain in the grass instead.

No one came. I grew weary, and for a change retreated into the armoury. Evidently, not the slightest heed was paid to the weapons now, and I was thinking with myself that, when I had got the books in order, I might give a few days to furbishing and oiling them, when the door from the gallery opened, and Clara entered.

"What! a truant?" she said.

"You take accusation at least by the forelock, Clara. Who is the real truant now—if I may suggest a mistake?"

"*I* never undertook anything. How many guesses have you made as to the cause of your desertion to-day?"

"Well, three or four."

"Have you made one as to the cause of

Miss Brotherton's graciousness to you yesterday?"

"At least I remarked the change."

"I will tell you. There was a short notice of some of your writings in a certain magazine which I contrived should fall in her way."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "I have never put my name to anything."

"But you have put the same name to all your contributions."

"How should the reviewer know it meant me?"

"Your own name was never mentioned."

I thought she looked a little confused as she said this.

"Then how should Miss Brotherton know it meant me?"

She hesitated a moment—then answered:

"Perhaps from internal evidence.—I suppose I must confess I told her."

"Then how did *you* know?"

"I have been one of your readers for a long time."

"But how did you come to know my work?"

"That has oozed out."

"Some one must have told you," I said.

"That is my secret," she replied, with the air of making it a mystery in order to tease me.

"It must be all a mistake," I said. "Show me the magazine."

"As you won't take my word for it, I won't."

"Well, I shall soon find out. There is but one could have done it. It is very kind of him, no doubt; but I don't like it. That kind of thing should come of itself—not through friends."

"Who do you fancy has done it?"

"If you have a secret, so have I."

My answer seemed to relieve her, though I could not tell what gave me the impression.

"You are welcome to yours, and I will keep mine," she said. "I only wanted to explain Miss Brotherton's condescension yesterday."

"I thought you were going to explain why you didn't come to-day."

"That is only a re-action. I have no doubt she thinks she went too far yesterday."

"That is absurd. She was civil; that was all."'

"In reading your thermometer, you must know its zero first," she replied, sententiously. "Is the sword you call yours there still?"

"Yes, and I call it mine still."

"Why don't you take it, then? I should have carried it off long ago."

"To steal my own would be to prejudice my right," I returned. "But I have often thought of telling Sir Giles about it."

"Why don't you, then?"

"I hardly know. My head has been full of other things, and any time will do. But I should like to see it in its own place once more."

I had taken it from the wall, and now handed it to her.

"Is this it?" she said carelessly.

"It is—just as it was carried off my bed that night."

"What room were you in?" she asked, trying to draw it from the sheath.

"I can't tell. I've never been in it since."

"You don't seem to me to have the curiosity natural to a——"

"To a woman—no," I said.

"To a man of spirit," she retorted, with an appearance of indignation. "I don't believe you can tell even how it came into your possession!"

"Why shouldn't it have been in the family from time immemorial?"

"So!—And you don't care either to recover it, or to find out how you lost it!"

"How can I? Where is Mr. Close?"

"Why, dead, years and years ago."

"So I understood. I can't well apply to to him, then, and I am certain no one else knows."

"Don't be too sure of that. Perhaps Sir Giles——"

"I am positive Sir Giles knows nothing about it."

"I have reason to think the story is not altogether unknown in the family."

"Have you told it, then?"

"No, but I *have* heard it alluded to."

"By Sir Giles?"

"No."

"By whom, then?"

"I will answer no more questions."

"Geoffrey, I suppose?"

"You are not polite. Do you suppose I am bound to tell you all I know?"

"Not by any means. Only, you oughtn't to pique a curiosity you don't mean to satisfy."

"But if I'm not at liberty to say more?—All I meant to say was that, if I were you, I *would* get back that sword."

"You hint at a secret, and yet suppose I could carry off its object as I might a rusty nail, which any passer-by would be made welcome to!"

"You might take it first, and mention the thing to Sir Giles afterwards."

"Why not mention it first?"

"Only on the supposition you had not the courage to claim it."

"In that case I certainly shouldn't have the courage to avow the deed afterwards. I don't understand you, Clara."

She laughed.

"That is always your way," she said. "You take everything so seriously! Why couldn't I make a proposition without being supposed to mean it?"

I was not satisfied. There was something short of uprightness in the whole tone of her attempted persuasion—which indeed I could hardly believe to have been so lightly intended as she now suggested. The effect of my feeling for her was that of a slight frost on the Spring blossoms.

She had been examining the hilt with a look of interest, and was now for the third time trying to draw the blade from the sheath.

"It's no use, Clara," I said. "It has been too many years glued to the scabbard."

"Glued!" she echoed. "What do you mean?"

I did not reply. An expression almost of horror shadowed her face, and at the same moment, to my astonishment, she drew it halfway.

"Why! you enchantress!" I exclaimed. "I never saw so much of it before. It is wonderfully bright—when one thinks of the years it has been shut in darkness."

She handed it to me as it was, saying,

"If that weapon was mine, I should never

rest until I had found out everything concerning it."

"That is easily said, Clara; but how can I? My uncle knew nothing about it. My grandmother did, no doubt, but almost all I can remember her saying was something about my great-grandfather and Sir Marmaduke."

As I spoke, I tried to draw it entirely, but it would yield no further. I then sought to replace it, but it would not move. That it yielded to Clara's touch gave it a fresh interest and value.

"I was sure it had a history," said Clara. "Have you no family papers? Your house you say is nearly as old as this: are there no papers of *any* kind in it?"

"Yes, a few," I answered—"the lease of the farm—and——"

"Oh! rubbish!" she said. "Isn't the house your own?"

"Yes."

"And have you ever thoroughly searched it?"

"I haven't had time yet."

"Not had time!" she repeated, in a tone of

something so like the uttermost contempt that I was bewildered.

"I mean some day or other to have a rummage in the old lumber-room," I said.

"Well, I do think that is the least you can do—if only out of respect to your ancestors. Depend on it, they don't like to be forgotten any more than other people."

The intention I had just announced was, however, but just born of her words. I had never yet searched even my grandmother's bureau, and had but this very moment fancied there might be papers in some old chest in the lumber-room. That room had already begun to occupy my thoughts from another point of view, and hence, in part, no doubt the suggestion. I was anxious to have a visit from Charley. He might bring with him some of our London friends. There was absolutely no common room in the house except the hall-kitchen. The room we had always called the lumber-room was over it, and nearly as large. It had a tall stone chimney-piece, elaborately carved, and clearly had once been a room for entertainment. The idea of restoring it to its ori-

ginal dignity arose in my mind; and I hoped that, furnished after as antique a fashion as I could compass, it would prove a fine room. The windows were small, to be sure, and the pitch rather low, but the whitewashed walls were panelled, and I had some hopes of the ceiling.

"Who knows," I said to myself, as I walked home that evening, "but I may come upon papers? I do remember something in the furthest corner that looks like a great chest."

Little more had passed between us, but Clara left me with the old dissatisfaction beginning to turn itself, as if about to awake once more. For the present I hung the half-naked blade upon the wall, for I dared not force it lest the scabbard should go to pieces.

When I reached home, I found a letter from Charley, to the effect that, if convenient, he would pay me a visit the following week. His mother and sister, he said, had been invited to Moldwarp Hall. His father was on the continent for his health. Without having consulted them on the matter, which might involve them in after-difficulty, he would come to me, and so have an opportunity of seeing them in the sun-

shine of his father's absence. I wrote at once that I should be delighted to receive him.

The next morning I spent with my man in the lumber-room; and before mid-day the rest of the house looked like an old curiosity shop—it was so littered with odds and ends of dust-bloomed antiquity. It was hard work, and in the afternoon I found myself disinclined for more exercise of a similar sort. I had Lilith out, and took a leisurely ride instead. The next day, and the next also, I remained at home. The following morning I went again to Moldwarp Hall. I had not been busy more than an hour or so, when Clara, who, I presume, had in passing heard me at work, looked in.

"Who is a truant now?" she said. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here has Miss Brotherton been almost curious concerning your absence, and Sir Giles more than once on the point of sending to inquire after you!"

"Why didn't he, then?"

"Oh! I suppose he was afraid it might look like an assertion of—of—of baronial rights, or something of the sort. How *could* you behave in such an inconsiderate fashion!"

"You must allow me to have *some* business of my own."

"Certainly. But with so many anxious friends, you ought to have given a hint of your intentions."

"I had none, however."

"Of which? Friends or intentions?"

"Either."

"What! No friends? I verily surprised Miss Pease in the act of studying her 'Cookery for Invalids'—in the hope of finding a patient in you, no doubt. She wanted to come and nurse you, but daren't propose it."

"It was very kind of her."

"No doubt. But then you see she's ready to commit suicide any day, poor old thing, but for lack of courage!"

"It must be dreary for her!"

"Dreary! I should poison the old dragon."

"Well, perhaps I had better tell you, for Miss Pease's sake, who is evidently the only one that cares a straw about *me* in the matter, that possibly I shall be absent a good many days this week, and perhaps the next too."

"Why, then—if I may ask—Mr. Absolute?"

"Because a friend of mine is going to pay me a visit. You remember Charley Osborne, don't you? Of course you do. You remember the ice-cave, I am sure."

"Yes, I do—quite well," she answered.

I fancied I saw a shadow cross her face.

"When do you expect him?" she asked, turning away, and picking a book from the floor.

"In a week or so, I think. He tells me his mother and sister are coming here on a visit."

"Yes—so I believe—to-morrow, I think. I wonder if I ought to be going. I don't think I will. I came to please them—at all events not to please myself; but as I find it pleasanter than I expected, I won't go without a hint and a half at least."

"Why should you? There is plenty of room."

"Yes; but don't you see?—so many inferiors in the house at once might be too much for Madame Dignity. She finds one quite enough, I suspect."

"You do not mean that she regards the Osbornes as inferiors?"

"Not a doubt of it. Never mind. I can take care of myself. Have you any work for me to-day?"

"Plenty, if you are in a mood for it."

"I will fetch Miss Brotherton."

"I can do without *her*."

She went, however, and did not return. As I walked home to dinner, she and Miss Brotherton passed me in the carriage, on their way, as I learned afterwards, to fetch the Osborne ladies from the rectory, some ten miles off. I did not return to Moldwarp Hall, but helped Styles in the lumber-room, which before night we had almost emptied.

The next morning I was favoured with a little desultory assistance from the two ladies, but saw nothing of the visitors. In the afternoon, and both the following days, I took my servant with me, who got through more work than the two together, and we advanced it so far that I was able to leave the room next the armoury in the hands of the carpenter and the housemaid, with sufficient directions, and did not return that week.

CHAPTER XV.

A TALK WITH CHARLEY.

THE following Monday, in the evening, Charley arrived, in great spirits, more excited indeed than I liked to see him. There was a restlessness in his eye which made me especially anxious, for it raised a doubt whether the appearance of good spirits was not the result merely of resistance to some anxiety. But I hoped my companionship, with the air and exercise of the country, would help to quiet him again. In the late twilight we took a walk together up and down my field.

"I suppose you let your mother know you were coming, Charley?" I said.

"I did not," he answered. "My father must have nothing to lay to their charge in case he should hear of our meeting."

"But he has not forbidden you to go home, has he?"

"No, certainly. But he as good as told me I was not to go home while he was away. He does not wish me to be there without his presence to counteract my evil influences. He seems to regard my mere proximity as dangerous. I sometimes wonder whether the severity of his religion may not have affected his mind. Almost all madness, you know, turns either upon love or religion."

"So I have heard. I doubt it—with men. It may be with women.—But you won't surprise them? It might startle your mother too much. She is not strong, you say. Hadn't I better tell Clara Coningham? She can let them know you are here."

"It would be better."

"What do you say to going there with me to-morrow? I will send my man with a note in the morning."

He looked a little puzzled and undetermined, but said at length,

"I daresay your plan is the best. How long has Miss Coningham been here?"

"About ten days, I think."

He looked thoughtful, and made no answer.

"I see, you are afraid of my falling in love with her again," I said. "I confess I like her much better than I did, but I am not quite sure about her yet. She is very bewitching anyhow, and a little more might make me lose my heart to her. The evident dislike she has to Brotherton would of itself recommend her to any friend of yours or mine."

He turned his face away.

"Do not be anxious about me," I went on. "The first shadowy conviction of any untruthfulness in her, if not sufficient to change my feelings at once, would at once initiate a backward movement in them."

He kept his face turned away, and I was perplexed. After a few moments of silence, he turned it towards me again, as if relieved by some resolution suddenly formed, and said with a smile under a still clouded brow,

"Well, old fellow, we'll see. It'll all come right, I daresay. Write your note early, and we'll follow it. How glad I *shall* be to have a

glimpse of that blessed mother of mine without her attendant dragon!"

"For God's sake don't talk of your father so! Surely, after all, he is a good man!"

"Then I want a new reading of the word."

"He loves God, at least."

"I won't stop to inquire—" said Charley, plunging at once into argument—"what influence for good it might or might not have to love a non-existence: I will only ask—Is it a good God he loves or a bad one? If the latter, he can hardly be called good for loving him."

"But if there be a God at all, he must be a good God."

"Suppose the true God to be the good God, it does not follow that my father worships *him*. There is such a thing as worshipping a false God. At least the Bible recognizes it. For my part, I find myself compelled to say—either that the true God is not a good God, or that my father does not worship the true God. If you say he worships the God of the Bible, I either admit or dispute the assertion, but set it aside as altering nothing; for if I admit it, the argument lies thus: my father wor-

ships a bad God; my father worships the God of the Bible: therefore the God of the Bible is a bad God; and if I admit the authority of the Bible, then the true God is a bad God. If, however, I dispute the assertion that he worships the God of the Bible, I am left to show, if I can, that the God of the Bible is a good God, and, if I admit the authority of the Bible, to worship another than my father's God. If I do not admit the authority of the Bible, there may, for all that, be a good God, or, which is next best to a perfectly good God, there may be no God at all."

"Put like a lawyer, Charley: and yet I would venture to join issue with your first assertion—on which the whole argument is founded—that your father worships a bad God."

"Assuredly what he asserts concerning his God is bad."

"Admitted; but does he assert *only* bad things of his God?"

"I daren't say that. But God is one. You will hardly dare the proposition that an infinite being may be partly good and partly bad."

"No. I heartily hold that God must be *one* —a proposition far more essential than that there is one God—so far, at least, as my understanding can judge. It is only in the limited human nature that good and evil can co-exist. But there is just the point: we are not speaking of the absolute God, but of the idea of a man concerning that God. You could suppose yourself utterly convinced of a good God long before your ideas of goodness were so correct as to render you incapable of attributing anything wrong to that God. Supposing such to be the case, and that you came afterwards to find that you had been thinking something wrong about him, do you think you would therefore grant that you had been believing either in a wicked or in a false God?"

"Certainly not."

"Then you must give your father the same scope. He attributes what we are absolutely certain are bad things to his God—and yet he may believe in a good God, for the good in his idea of God is that alone in virtue of which he is able to believe in him. No mortal can believe in the bad."

"He puts the evil foremost in his creed and exhortations."

"That may be. Few people know their own deeper minds. The more potent a power in us, I suspect it is the more hidden from our scrutiny."

"If there be a God, then, Wilfrid, he is very indifferent to what his creatures think of him."

"Perhaps very patient and hopeful, Charley —who knows? Perhaps he will not force himself upon them, but help them to grow into the true knowledge of him. Your father may worship the true God, and yet have only a little of that knowledge."

A silence followed. At length—"Thank you for my father," said Charley.

"Thank my uncle," I said.

"For not being like my father?—I do," he returned.

It was the loveliest evening that brooded round us as we walked. The moon had emerged from a rippled sea of grey cloud, over which she cast her dull opaline halo. Great masses and banks of cloud lay about the rest of the heavens, and, in the dark rifts between, a

star or two were visible, gazing from the awful distance.

"I wish I could let it into me, Wilfrid," said Charley, after we had been walking in silence for some time along the grass.

"Let what into you, Charley?"

"The night and the blue and the stars."

"Why don't you, then?"

"I hate being taken in. The more pleasant a self-deception, the less I choose to submit to it."

"That is reasonable. But where lies the deception?"

"I don't say it's a deception. I only don't know that it isn't."

"Please explain."

"I mean what you call the beauty of the night."

"Surely there can be little question of that?"

"Ever so little is enough. Suppose I asked you wherein its beauty consisted: would you be satisfied if I said—In the arrangement of the blue and the white, with the sparkles of yellow, and the colours about the scarce visible moon?"

"Certainly not. I should reply that it lay in the gracious peace of the whole—troubled only with the sense of some lovely secret behind, of which itself was but the half-modelled representation, and therefore the reluctant outcome."

"Suppose I rejected the latter half of what you say, admitting the former, but judging it only the fortuitous result of the half-necessary, half-fortuitous concurrences of nature. Suppose I said:—The air which is necessary to our life, happens to be blue; the stars can't help shining through it and making it look deep; and the clouds are just there because they must be somewhere till they fall again; all which is more agreeable to us than fog because we feel more comfortable in weather of the sort, whence, through complacency and habit, we have got to call it beautiful:—suppose I said this, would you accept it?"

"Such a theory would destroy my delight in nature altogether."

"Well, isn't it the truth?"

"It would be easy to show that the sense of beauty does not spring from any amount of comfort; but I do not care to pursue the argu-

ment from that starting-point.—I confess when you have once waked the questioning spirit, and I look up at the clouds and the stars with what I may call sharpened eyes—eyes, that is, which assert their seeing, and so render themselves incapable for the time of submitting to impressions, I am as blind as any Sadducee could desire. I see blue, and white, and gold, and, in short, a tent-roof somewhat ornate. I daresay if I were in a miserable mood, having been deceived and disappointed like Hamlet, I should with him see there nothing but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. But I know that when I am passive to its powers, I am aware of a presence altogether different—of a something at once soothing and elevating, powerful to move shame—even contrition and the desire of amendment."

"Yes, yes," said Charley hastily. "But let me suppose further—and, perhaps you will allow, better—that this blueness—I take a part for the whole—belongs essentially and of necessity to the atmosphere, itself so essential to our physical life; suppose also that this blue has essential relation to our spiritual nature—

taking for the moment our spiritual nature for granted—suppose, in a word, all nature so related, not only to our physical but to our spiritual nature, that it and we form an organic whole full of action and reaction between the parts—would that satisfy you? Would it enable you to look on the sky this night with absolute pleasure? would you want nothing more?"

I thought for a little before I answered.

"No, Charley," I said at last—"it would not satisfy me. For it would indicate that beauty might be, after all, but the projection of my own mind—the name I gave to a harmony between that around me and that within me. There would then be nothing absolute in beauty. There would be no such thing in itself. It would exist only as a phase of me when I was in a certain mood; and when I was earthly-minded, passionate, or troubled, it would be *no*where. But in my best moods I feel that in nature lies the form and fashion of a peace and grandeur so much beyond anything in me, that they rouse the sense of poverty and incompleteness and blame in the want of them."

"Do you perceive whither you are leading yourself?"

"I would rather hear you say."

"To this then—that the peace and grandeur of which you speak must be a mere accident, therefore an unreality and pure *appearance*, or the outcome and representation of a peace and grandeur which, not to be found in us, yet exist, and make use of this frame of things to set forth and manifest themselves in order that we may recognise and desire them."

"Granted—heartily."

"In other words—you lead yourself inevitably to a God manifest in nature—not as a powerful being—that is a theme absolutely without interest to me—but as possessed in himself of the original pre-existent beauty, the counterpart of which in us we call art, and who has fashioned us so that we must fall down and worship the image of himself which he has set up."

"That's good, Charley. I'm so glad you've worked that out!"

"It doesn't in the least follow that I believe it. I cannot even say I wish I did:—for what

I know, that might be to wish to be deceived. Of all miseries—to believe in a lovely thing and find it not true—that must be the worst."

"You might never find it out, though," I said. "You might be able to comfort yourself with it all your life."

"I was wrong," he cried fiercely. "Never to find it out would be the hell of all hells. Wilfrid, I am ashamed of you!"

"So should I be, Charley, if I had meant it. I only wanted to make you speak. I agree with you entirely. But I *do* wish we could be *quite* sure of it; for I don't believe any man can ever be sure of a thing that is not true."

"My father is sure that the love of nature is not only a delusion, but a snare. I should have no right to object, were he not equally sure of the existence of a God who created and rules it. By the way, if I believed in a God, I should say *creates* not *created*. I told him once, not long ago, when he fell out upon nature—he had laid hands on a copy of *Endymion* belonging to me —I don't know how the devil he got it—I asked him whether he thought the devil made the world. You should have seen the white wrath

he went into at the question! I told him it was generally believed one or the other did make the world. He told me God made the world, but sin had unmade it. I asked him if it was sin that made it so beautiful. He said it was sin that made me think it so beautiful. I remarked how very ugly it must have looked when God had just finished it! He called me a blasphemer, and walked to the door. I stopped him for a moment by saying that I thought, after all, he must be right, for according to geologists the world must have been a horrible place, and full of the most hideous creatures, before sin came and made it lovely. When he saw my drift, he strode up to me like—well, very like his own God, I should think—and was going to strike me. I looked him in the eyes without moving, as if he had been a madman. He turned and left the room. I left the house, and went back to London the same night."

"Oh! Charley, Charley, that was too bad!"

"I knew it, Wilfrid, and yet I did it! But if your father had made a downright coward of you, afraid to speak the truth, or show what you were thinking, you also might find that, when

anger gave you a fictitious courage, you could not help breaking out. It's only another form of cowardice, I know; and I am as much ashamed of it as you could wish me to be."

"Have you made it up with him since?"

"I've never seen him since."

"Haven't you written, then?"

"No. Where's the use? He never would understand me. He knows no more of the condition of my mind than he does of the other side of the moon. If I offered such, he would put aside all apology for my behaviour to him—repudiating himself, and telling me it was the wrath of an offended God, not of an earthly parent, I had to deprecate. If I told him I had only spoken against his false God—how far would that go to mend the matter, do you think?"

"Not far, I must allow. But I am very sorry."

"I wouldn't care if I could be sure of anything—or even sure that, if I were sure, I shouldn't be mistaken."

"I'm afraid you're very morbid, Charley."

"Perhaps. But you cannot deny that my

father is sure of things that you believe utterly false."

"I suspect, however, that, if we were able to get a bird's-eye view of his mind and all its workings, we should discover that what he called assurance was not the condition you would call such. You would find it was not the certainty you covet."

"I *have* thought of that, and it is my only comfort. But I am sick of the whole subject. See that cloud! Isn't it like Death on the pale horse? What fun it must be for the cherubs, on such a night as this, to go blowing the clouds into fantastic shapes with their trumpet cheeks!"

Assurance was ever what Charley wanted, and unhappily the sense of intellectual insecurity weakened his moral action.

Once more I reveal a haunting uneasiness in the expression of a hope that the ordered character of the conversation I have just set down may not render it incredible to my reader. I record the result alone. The talk itself was far more desultory, and in consequence of questions, objections, and explanations, divaricated much from the comparatively direct line I

have endeavoured to give it here. In the hope of making my reader understand both Charley and myself, I have sought to make the winding and rough path straight and smooth.

CHAPTER XVI.

TAPESTRY.

HAVING heard what I was about at the Hall, Charley expressed a desire to take a share in my labours, especially as thereby he would be able to see more of his mother and sister. I took him straight to the book-rooms, and we were hard at work when Clara entered.

"Here is your old friend Charley Osborne," I said. "You remember Miss Coningham, Charley, I know."

He advanced in what seemed a strangely embarrassed—indeed, rather sheepish manner, altogether unlike his usual bearing. I attributed it to a doubt whether Clara would acknowledge their old acquaintance. On her part,

she met him with some frankness, but I thought also a rather embarrassed look, which was the more surprising as I had let her know he was coming. But they shook hands, and in a little while we were all chatting comfortably.

"Shall I go and tell Mrs. Osborne you are here?" she asked.

"Yes, if you please," said Charley, and she went.

In a few minutes Mrs. Osborne and Mary entered. The meeting was full of affection, but to my eye looked like a meeting of the living and the dead in a dream—there was such an evident sadness in it, as if each was dimly aware that they met but in appearance, and were in reality far asunder. I could not doubt that however much they loved him, and however little they sympathized with his father's treatment of him, his mother and sister yet regarded him as separated from them by a great gulf—that of culpable unbelief. But they seemed therefore only the more anxious to please and serve him—their anxiety revealing itself in an eagerness painfully like the service offered to one whom the doctors have given up, and who

may now have any indulgence he happens to fancy.

"I say, mother," said Charley, who seemed to strive after an airier manner even than usual—"couldn't you come and help us? It would be so jolly!"

"No, my dear; I mustn't leave Lady Brotherton. That would be rude, you know. But I daresay Mary might."

"Oh, please, mamma! I should like it so much—especially if Clara would stop! But perhaps Mr. Cumbermede—we ought to have asked him first."

"Yes—to be sure—he's the foreman," said Charley. "But he's not a bad fellow, and won't be disobliging. Only you must do as he tells you, or it'll be the worse for us all. *I* know him."

"I shall be delighted," I said. "I can give both the ladies plenty to do. Indeed I regard Miss Coningham as one of my hands already. Won't Miss Brotherton honour us to-day, Miss Coningham?"

"I will go and ask her," said Clara.

They all withdrew. In a little while I had

four assistants, and we got on famously. The carpenter had been hard at work, and the room next the armoury, the oak-panelling of which had shown considerable signs of decay, had been repaired, and the shelves, which were in tolerable condition, were now ready to receive their burden, and reflect the first rays of a dawning order.

Plenty of talk went on during the dusting and arranging of the books by their size, which was the first step towards a cosmos. There was a certain playful naïveté about Charley's manner and speech, when he was happy, which gave him an instant advantage with women, and even made the impression of wit where there was only grace. Although he was perfectly capable, however, of engaging to any extent in the *badinage* which has ever been in place between young men and women since dawning humanity was first aware of a lovely difference, there was always a certain indescribable dignity about what he said which I now see could have come only from a *believing* heart. I use the word advisedly, but would rather my reader should find what I mean than require

me to explain it fully. Belief, to my mind, lies chiefly in the practical recognition of the high and pure.

Miss Brotherton looked considerably puzzled sometimes, and indeed out of her element. But her dignity had no chance with so many young people, and was compelled to thaw visibly; and while growing more friendly with the others, she could not avoid unbending towards me also, notwithstanding I was a neighbour and the son of a dairy-farmer.

Mary Osborne took little part in the fun beyond a smile, or in the more solid conversation beyond an assent or an ordinary remark. I did not find her very interesting. An onlooker would probably have said she lacked expression. But the stillness upon her face bore to me the shadow of a reproof. Perhaps it was only a want of sympathy with what was going on around her. Perhaps her soul was either far withdrawn from its present circumstances, or not yet awake to the general interests of life. There was little in the form or hue of her countenance to move admiration, beyond a complexion without spot. It was very

fair and delicate, with little more colour in it than in the white rose, which but the faintest warmth redeems from dead whiteness. Her features were good in form, but in no way remarkable; her eyes were of the so-called hazel, which consists of a mingling of brown and green; her figure was good, but seemed unelastic, and she had nothing of her brother's gaiety or grace of movement or expression. I do not mean that either her motions or her speech was clumsy—there was simply nothing to remark in them beyond the absence of anything special. In a word, I did not find her interesting, save as the sister of my delightful Charley, and the sharer of his mother's griefs concerning him.

"If I had as good help in the afternoon," I said, "we should have all the books on the shelves to-night, and be able to set about assorting them to-morrow."

"I am sorry I cannot come this afternoon," said Miss Brotherton. "I should have been most happy if I could. It is really very pleasant—notwithstanding the dust. But Mrs. Osborne and mamma want me to go with them

to Minstercombe. You will lunch with us to-day, won't you?" she added, turning to Charley.

"Thank you, Miss Brotherton," he replied; "I should have been delighted, but I am not my own master—I am Cumbermede's slave at present, and can eat and drink only when and where he chooses."

"You *must* stay with your mother, Charley," I said. "You cannot refuse Miss Brotherton."

She could thereupon scarcely avoid extending the invitation to me, but I declined it on some pretext or other, and I was again, thanks to Lilith, back from my dinner before they had finished luncheon. The carriage was at the door when I rode up, and the moment I heard it drive away, I went to the dining-room to find my coadjutors. The only person there was Miss Pease. A thought struck me.

"Won't you come and help us, Miss Pease?" I said. "I have lost one of my assistants, and I am very anxious to get the room we are at now so far finished to-night."

A smile found its way to her cold eyes, and set the blue sparkling for one briefest moment.

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Cumbermede, but——"

"Kind!" I exclaimed—"I want your help, Miss Pease."

"I'm afraid——"

"Lady Brotherton can't want you now. Do oblige me. You will find it fun."

She smiled outright—evidently at the fancy of any relation between her and fun.

"Do go and put a cap on, and a cotton dress, and come," I persisted.

Without another word she left the room. I was still alone in the library when she came to me, and having shown her what I wanted, we were already busy when the rest arrived.

"Oh, Peasey! Are you there?" said Clara, as she entered—not unkindly.

"I have got a substitute for Miss Brotherton, you see, Clara—Miss Coningham—I beg your pardon."

"There's no occasion to beg my pardon. Why shouldn't you call me Clara if you like? It *is* my name."

"Charley might be taking the same liberty," I returned, extemporizing a reason.

"And why *shouldn't* Charley take the same liberty?" she retorted.

"For no reason that I know," I answered, a trifle hurt, "if it be agreeable to the lady."

"And the gentleman," she amended.

"And the gentleman," I added.

"Very well. Then we are all good boys and girls. Now, Peasey, I'm very glad you're come. Only mind you get back to your place before the ogress returns, or you'll have your head snapped off."

Was I right, or was it the result of the slight offence I had taken?—Was the gracious, graceful, naïve, playful, daring woman—or could she be—or had she been just the least little bit vulgar? I am afraid I was then more sensitive to vulgarity in a woman, real or fancied, than even to wickedness—at least I thought I was. At all events, the first *conviction* of anything common or unrefined in a woman would at once have placed me beyond the sphere of her attraction. But I had no time to think the suggestion over now; and in a few minutes—whether she saw the cloud on my face I cannot tell—Clara had given me a look and a smile which

banished the possibility of my thinking about it for the present.

Miss Pease worked more diligently than any of the party. She seldom spoke, and when she did, it was in a gentle, subdued, almost mournful tone; but the company of the young people, without the restraint of her mistress, was evidently grateful to what of youth yet remained in her oppressed being.

Before it was dark we had got the books all upon the shelves, and leaving Charley with the ladies, I walked home.

I found Styles had got everything out of the lumber-room except a heavy oak chest in the corner, which, our united strength being insufficient to displace it, I concluded was fixed to the floor. I collected all the keys my aunt had left behind her, but sought the key of this chest in vain. For my uncle, I never saw a key in his possession. Even what little money he might have in the house, was only put away at the back of an open drawer. For the present, therefore, we had to leave it undisturbed.

When Charley came home, we went to look

at it together. It was of oak, and somewhat elaborately carved.

I was very restless in bed that night. The air was close and hot, and as often as I dropped half asleep I woke again with a start. My thoughts kept stupidly running on the old chest. It had mechanically possessed me. I felt no disturbing curiosity concerning its contents; I was not annoyed at the want of the key; it was only that, like a nursery rhyme that keeps repeating itself over and over in the half-sleeping brain, this chest kept rising before me till I was out of patience with its intrusiveness. It brought me wide awake at last; and I thought, as I could not sleep, I would have a search for the key. I got out of bed, put on my dressing-gown and slippers, lighted my chamber-candle, and made an inroad upon the contents of the closet in my room, which had apparently remained undisturbed since the morning when I missed my watch. I believe I had never entered it since. Almost the first thing I came upon was the pendulum, which woke a strange sensation for which I could not account, until by slow degrees the twilight

memory of the incidents connected with it half dawned upon me. I searched the whole place, but not a key could I find.

I started violently at the sound of something like a groan, and for the briefest imaginable moment forgot that my grannie was dead, and thought it must come from her room. It may be remembered that such a sound had led me to her in the middle of the night on which she died. Whether I really heard the sound, or only fancied I heard it—by some half mechanical action of the brain, roused by the association of ideas—I do not even yet know. It may have been changed or expanded into a groan, from one of those innumerable sounds heard in every old house in the stillness of the night; for such, in the absence of the correction given by other sounds, assume place and proportion as it were at their pleasure. What lady has not at midnight mistaken the trail of her own dress on the carpet, in a silent house, for some tumult in a distant room? Curious to say, however, it now led to the same action as the groan I had heard so many years before; for I caught up my candle at once, and took

my way down to the kitchen, and up the winding stair behind the chimney to grannie's room. Strange as it may seem, I had not been in it since my return; for my thoughts had been so entirely occupied with other things, that, although I now and then looked forward with considerable expectation to a thorough search of the place, especially of the bureau, I kept it up as a *bonne bouche*, the anticipation of which was consolation enough for the postponement.

I confess it was with no little quavering of the spirit that I sought this chamber in the middle of the night. For, by its association with one who had from my earliest recollection seemed like something forgotten and left behind in the onward rush of life, it was, far more than anything else in the house, like a piece of the past embedded in the present—a fragment that had been, by some eddy in the stream of time, prevented from gliding away down its course, and left to lie for ever in a cranny of the solid shore of unmoving space. But although subject to more than the ordinary tremor at the thought of unknown and invisible presences, I must say for myself that I had

never yielded so far as to allow such tremor to govern my actions. Even in my dreams I have resisted ghostly terrors, and can recall one in which I so far conquered a lady-ghost who took every means of overcoming me with terror, that at length she fell in love with me, whereupon my fear vanished utterly—a conceited fancy, and as such let it fare.

I opened the door then with some trembling, half expecting to see first the white of my grannie's cap against the tall back of her dark chair. But my senses were sound, and no such illusion seized me. All was empty, cheerless, and musty. Grannie's bed, with its white curtains, looked as if it were mouldering away after her. The dust lay thick on the counterpane of patchwork silk. The bureau stood silent with all its secrets. In the fire-place was the same brushwood and coals which Nannie laid the morning of grannie's death: interrupted by the discovery of my presence, she had left it, and that fire had never been lighted. Half for the sake of companionship, half because the air felt sepulchral and I was thinly clad, I put my candle to it and it blazed up. My cour-

age revived, and after a little more gazing about the room, I ventured to sit down in my grannie's chair and watch the growing fire. Warned, however, by the shortness of my candle, I soon rose to proceed with my search, and turned towards the bureau.

Here, however, the same difficulty occurred. The top of the bureau was locked as when I had last tried it, and not one of my keys would fit it. At a loss what to do or where to search, I dropped again into the chair by the fire, and my eyes went roving about the room. They fell upon a black dress which hung against the wall. At the same moment I remembered that, when she gave me the watch, she took the keys of the bureau from her pocket. I went to the dress and found a pocket, not indeed in the dress, but hanging under it from the same peg. There her keys were! It would have been a marvel to me how my aunt came to leave them undisturbed all those years, but for the instant suggestion that my uncle must have expressed a wish to that effect. With eager hand I opened the bureau. Besides many trinkets in the drawers, some of them of exceedingly antique

form, and, I fancied, of considerable value, I found in the pigeon-holes what I was far more pleased to discover—a good many letters, carefully tied in small bundles, with ribbon which had lost all determinable colour. These I resolved to take an early opportunity of reading, but replaced for the present, and, having come at last upon one hopeful-looking key, I made haste to return before my candle, which was already flickering in the socket, should go out altogether, and leave me darkling. When I reached the kitchen, however, I found the grey dawn already breaking. I retired once more to my chamber, and was soon fast asleep.

In the morning, my first care was to try the key. It fitted. I oiled it well, and then tried the lock. I had to use considerable force, but at last there came a great clang that echoed through the empty room. When I raised the lid, I knew by the weight it was of iron. In fact, the whole chest was iron with a casing of oak. The lock threw eight bolts, which laid hold of a rim that ran all round the lip of the chest. It was full of "very ancient and fish-like" papers and parchments. I do not know

whether my father or grandfather had ever disturbed them, but I am certain my uncle never had, for, as far back as I can remember, the part of the room where it stood was filled with what had been, at one time and another, condemned as lumber.

Charley was intensely interested in the discovery, and would have sat down at once to examine the contents of the chest, had I not persuaded him to leave them till the afternoon, that we might get on with our work at the Hall.

The second room was now ready for the carpenter, but, having had a peep of tapestry behind the shelves, a new thought had struck me. If it was in good preservation, it would be out of the question to hide it behind books.

I fear I am getting tedious. My apology for diffuseness in this part of my narrative is that some threads of the fringe of my own fate show every now and then in the record of these proceedings. I confess also that I hang back from certain things which are pressing nearer with their claim for record.

When we reached the Hall, I took the car-

penter with me, and had the bookshelves taken down. To my disappointment we found that an oblong piece of some size was missing from the centre of the tapestry on one of the walls. That which covered the rest of the room was entire. It was all of good Gobelins work—somewhat tame in colour. The damaged portion represented a wooded landscape with water and reedy flowers and aquatic fowl, towards which in the distance came a hunter with a crossbow in his hand, and a queer, lurcher-looking dog bounding uncouthly at his heel; the edge of the vacant space cut off the dog's tail and the top of the man's crossbow.

I went to find Sir Giles. He was in the dining-room, where they had just finished breakfast.

"Ah, Mr. Cumbermede!" he said, rising as I entered, and holding out his hand—"here already?"

"We have uncovered some tapestry, Sir Giles, and I want you to come and look at it, if you please."

"I will," he answered. "Would any of you ladies like to go and see it?"

His daughter and Clara rose. Lady Brotherton and Mrs. Osborne sat still. Mary, glancing at her mother, remained seated also.

"Won't you come, Miss Pease?" I said.

She looked almost alarmed at the audacity of the proposal, and murmured, "No, thank you," with a glance at Lady Brotherton, which appeared as involuntary as it was timid.

"Is my son with you?" asked Mrs. Osborne.

I told her he was.

"I shall look in upon you before the morning is over," she said quietly.

They were all pleased with the tapestry, and the ladies offered several conjectures as to the cause of the mutilation.

"It would be a shame to cover it up again—would it not, Sir Giles?" I remarked.

"Indeed it would," he assented.

"If it weren't for that broken piece," said Clara. "That spoils it altogether. *I* should have the books up again as soon as possible."

"It does look shabby," said Charley. "I can't say I should enjoy having anything so defective always before my eyes."

"We must have it taken down very carefully,

Hobbes," said Sir Giles, turning to the carpenter.

"*Must* it come down, Sir Giles?" I interposed. "I think it would be risky. No one knows how long it has been there, and though it might hang where it is for a century yet, and look nothing the worse, it can't be strong, and at best we could not get it down without some injury, while it is a great chance if it would fit any other place half as well."

"What do you propose, then?"

"This is the largest room of the six, and the best lighted—with that lovely oriel window: I would venture to propose, Sir Giles, that it should be left clear of books and fitted up as a reading-room."

"But how would you deal with that frightful *lacuna* in the tapestry?" said Charley.

"Yes," said Sir Giles; "it won't look handsome, I fear—do what you will."

"I think I know how to manage it," I said. "If I succeed to your satisfaction, will you allow me to carry out the project?"

"But what are we to do with the books, then? We shan't have room for them."

"Couldn't you let me have the next room beyond?"

"You mean to turn me out, I suppose," said Clara.

"Is there tapestry on your walls?" I asked.

"Not a thread—all wainscot—painted."

"Then your room would be the very thing."

"It is much larger than any of these," she said.

"Then do let us have it for the library, Sir Giles," I entreated.

"I will see what Lady Brotherton says," he replied, and left the room.

In a few minutes we heard his step returning.

"Lady Brotherton has no particular objection to giving up the room you want," he said. "Will you see Mrs. Wilson, Clara, and arrange with her for your accommodation?"

"With pleasure. I don't mind where I'm put—unless it be in Lord Edward's room—where the ghost is."

"You mean the one next to ours? There is no ghost there, I assure you," said Sir Giles, laughing, as he again left the room with short, heavy steps. "Manage it all to your own mind,

Mr. Cumbermede. I shall be satisfied," he called back as he went.

"Until further notice," I said, with grandiloquence, "I request that no one may come into this room. If you are kind enough to assort the books we put up yesterday, oblige me by going through the armoury. I must find Mrs. Wilson."

"I will go with you," said Clara. "I wonder where the old thing will want to put me. I'm not going where I don't like, I can tell her," she added, following me down the stair and across the hall and the court.

We found the housekeeper in her room. I accosted her in a friendly way. She made but a bare response.

"Would you kindly show me where I slept that night I lost my sword, Mrs. Wilson?" I said.

"I know nothing about your sword, Mr. Cumbermede," she answered, shaking her head and pursing up her mouth.

"I don't ask you anything about it, Mrs. Wilson; I only ask you where I slept the night I lost it."

"Really, Mr. Cumbermede, you can hardly

expect me to remember in what room a visitor slept—let me see—it must be twelve or fifteen years ago! I do not take it upon me."

"Oh! never mind, then. I referred to the circumstances of that night, thinking they might help you to remember the room; but it is of no consequence; I shall find it for myself. Miss Coningham will, I hope, help me in the search. She knows the house better than I do."

"I must attend to my own business first, if you please, sir," said Clara. "Mrs. Wilson, I am ordered out of my room by Mr. Cumbermede. You must find me fresh quarters, if you please."

Mrs. Wilson stared.

"Do you mean, miss, that you want your things moved to another bedroom?"

"That *is* what I mean, Mrs. Wilson."

"I must see what Lady Brotherton says to it, miss."

"Do, by all means."

I saw that Clara was bent on annoying her old enemy, and interposed.

"Sir Giles and Lady Brotherton have agreed to let me have Miss Coningham's room for an

addition to the library, Mrs. Wilson," I said.

She looked very grim, but made no answer. We turned and left her. She stood for a moment as if thinking, and then, taking down her bunch of keys, followed us.

"If you will come this way," she said, stopping just behind us at another door in the court, "I think I can show you the room you want. But really, Mr. Cumbermede, you are turning the place upside down. If I had thought it would come to this——"

"I hope to do so a little more yet, Mrs. Wilson," I interrupted. "But I am sure you will be pleased with the result."

She did not reply, but led the way up a stair, across the little open gallery, and by passages I did not remember, to the room I wanted. It was in precisely the same condition as when I occupied it.

"This is the room, I believe," she said, as she unlocked and threw open the door. "Perhaps it would suit you, Miss Coningham?"

"Not in the least," answered Clara. "Who knows which of my small possessions might vanish before the morning!"

The housekeeper's face grew turkey-red with indignation.

"Mr. Cumbermede has been filling your head with some of his romances, I see, Miss Clara!"

I laughed, for I did not care to show myself offended with her rudeness.

"Never you mind," said Clara; "I am *not* going to sleep there."

"Very good," said Mrs. Wilson, in a tone of offence severely restrained.

"Will you show me the way to the library?" I requested.

"I will," said Clara; "I know it as well as Mrs. Wilson—every bit."

"Then that is all I want at present, Mrs. Wilson," I said, as we came out of the room. "Don't lock the door, though, please," I added. "Or, if you do, give me the key."

She left the door open, and us in the passage. Clara led me to the library. There we found Charley waiting our return.

"Will you take that little boy to his mother, Clara?" I said. "I don't want him here to-day. We'll have a look over those papers in the evening, Charley."

"That's right," said Clara. "I hope Charley will help you to a little rational interest in your own affairs. I am quite bewildered to think that an author, not to say a young man, the sole remnant of an ancient family, however humble, shouldn't even know whether he had any papers in the house or not."

"We've come upon a glorious nest of such addled eggs, Clara. Charley and I are going to blow them to-night," I said.

"You never know when such eggs are addled," retorted Clara. "You'd better put them under some sensible fowl or other first," she added, looking back from the door as they went.

I turned to the carpenter's tool-basket, and taking from it an old chisel, a screw-driver, and a pair of pincers, went back to the room we had just left.

There could be no doubt about it. There was the tip of the dog's tail, and the top of the hunter's crossbow.

But my reader may not have retained in her memory the facts to which I implicitly refer. I would therefore, to spare repetition, beg her

to look back to chapter xiv., vol. i., containing the account of the loss of my sword.

In the consternation caused me by the discovery that this loss was no dream of the night, I had never thought of examining the wall of the chamber, to see whether there was in it a door or not; but I saw now at once plainly enough that the inserted patch did cover a small door. Opening it, I found within, a creaking wooden stair, leading up to another low door, which, fashioned like the door of a companion, opened upon the roof:—nowhere, except in the towers, had the Hall more than two stories. As soon as I had drawn back the bolt and stepped out, I found myself standing at the foot of an ornate stack of chimneys, and remembered quite well having tried the door that night Clara and I were shut out on the leads—the same night on which my sword was stolen.

For the first time the question now rose in my mind whether Mrs. Wilson could have been in league with Mr. Close. Was it likely I should have been placed in a room so entirely fitted to his purposes by accident? But I could not imagine any respectable woman

running such a risk of terrifying a child out of his senses, even if she could have connived at his being robbed of what she might well judge unsuitable for his possession.

Descending again to the bed-room, I set to work with my tools. The utmost care was necessary, for the threads were weak with old age. I had only one or two slight mishaps, however, succeeding on the whole better than I had expected. Leaving the door denuded of its covering, I took the patch on my arm, and again sought the library. Hobbes's surprise, and indeed pleasure, when he saw that my plunder not only fitted the gap, but completed the design, was great. I directed him to get the whole piece down as carefully as he could, and went to extract, if possible, a favour from Lady Brotherton.

She was of course very stiff—no doubt she would have called it dignified; but I did all I could to please her, and perhaps in some small measure succeeded. After representing, amongst other advantages, what an addition a suite of rooms filled with a valuable library must be to the capacity of the house for the reception

and entertainment of guests, I ventured at last to beg the services of Miss Pease for the repair of the bit of the tapestry.

She rang the bell, sent for Miss Pease, and ordered her, in a style of the coldest arrogance, to put herself under my direction. She followed me to the door in the meekest manner, but declined the arm I offered. As we went I explained what I wanted, saying I could not trust it to any hands but those of a lady, expressing a hope that she would not think I had taken too great a liberty, and begging her to say nothing about the work itself, as I wished to surprise Sir Giles and my assistants. She said she would be most happy to help me, but when she saw how much was wanted, she did look a little dismayed. She went and fetched her work-basket at once, however, and set about it, tacking the edges to a strip of canvas, in preparation for some kind of darning, which would not, she hoped, be unsightly.

For a whole week she and the carpenter were the only persons I admitted, and while she gave to her darning every moment she could redeem from her attendance on Lady Brotherton, the

carpenter and I were busy—he cleaning and polishing, and I ranging the more deserted parts of the house to find furniture suitable for our purpose. In Clara's room was an old Turkey-carpet which we appropriated, and when we had the tapestry up again, which Miss Pease had at length restored in a marvellous manner —surpassing my best hopes, and more like healing than repairing—the place was to my eyes a very nest of dusky harmonies.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OLD CHEST.

I CANNOT help dwelling for a moment on the scene, although it is not of the slightest consequence to my story, when Sir Giles and Lady Brotherton entered the reading-room of the resuscitated library of Moldwarp Hall. It was a bright day of Autumn. Outside all was brilliant. The latticed oriel looked over the lawn and the park, where the trees had begun to gather those rich hues which could hardly be the heralds of death if it were the ugly thing it appears. Beyond the fading woods rose a line of blue heights meeting the more ethereal blue of the sky, now faded to a colder and paler tint. The dappled skins of the fallow deer glimmered through the trees, and the whiter ones among

them cast a light round them in the shadows. Through the trees that on one side descended to the meadow below, came the shine of the water where the little brook had spread into still pools. All without was bright with sunshine and clear air. But when you turned, all was dark, sombre, and rich, like an Autumn ten times faded. Through the open door of the next room on one side, you saw the shelves full of books, and from beyond, through the narrow uplifted door, came the glimmer of the weapons on the wall of the little armoury. Two ancient tapestry-covered settees, in which the ravages of moth and worm had been met by skilful repair of chisel and needle, a heavy table of oak, with carved sides, as black as ebony, and a few old, straight-backed chairs, were the sole furniture.

Sir Giles expressed much pleasure, and Lady Brotherton, beginning to enter a little into my plans, was more gracious than hitherto.

"We must give a party as soon as you have finished, Mr. Cumbermede," she said; "and—"

"That will be some time yet," I interrupted,

not desiring the invitation she seemed about to force herself to utter; "and I fear there are not many in this neighbourhood who will appreciate the rarity and value of the library—if the other rooms should turn out as rich as that one."

"I believe old books *are* expensive now-a-days," she returned. "They are more sought after, I understand."

We resumed our work with fresh vigour, and got on faster. Both Clara and Mary were assiduous in their help.

To go back for a little to my own old chest—we found it, as I said, full of musty papers. After turning over a few, seeming, to my uneducated eye, deeds and wills and such like, out of which it was evident I could gather no barest meaning without a labour I was not inclined to expend on them—for I had no pleasure in such details as involved nothing of the picturesque—I threw the one in my hand upon the heap already taken from the box, and to the indignation of Charley, who was absorbed in one of them, and had not spoken a word for at least a quarter of an hour, exclaimed—

"Come, Charley; I'm sick of the rubbish. Let's go and have a walk before supper."

"Rubbish!" he repeated; "I am ashamed of you!"

"I see Clara has been setting you on. I wonder what she's got in her head. I am sure I have quite a sufficient regard for family history and all that."

"Very like it!" said Charley—"calling such a chestful as this rubbish!"

"I am pleased enough to possess it," I said; "but if they had been such books as some of those at the Hall——"

"Look here, then," he said, stooping over the chest, and with some difficulty hauling out a great folio which he had discovered below, but had not yet examined—"just see what you can make of that."

I opened the title-page rather eagerly. I stared. Could I believe my eyes? First of all on the top of it, in the neatest old hand, was written—"Guilfrid Combremead His Boke. 1630." Then followed what I will not write, lest this MS. should by any accident fall into the hands of book-hunters before my death. I jumped to my feet,

gave a shout that brought Charley to his feet also, and danced about the empty room hugging the folio. "Have you lost your senses?" said Charley; but when he had a peep of the title-page, he became as much excited as myself, and it was some time before he could settle down to the papers again. Like a bee over a flower-bed, I went dipping and sipping at my treasure. Every word of the well-known lines bore a flavour of ancient verity such as I had never before perceived in them. At length I looked up and finding him as much absorbed as I had been myself—

"Well, Charley, what are you finding there?" I asked.

"Proof perhaps that you come of an older family than you think," he answered; "proof certainly that some part at least of the Moldwarp property was at one time joined to the Moat, and that you are of the same stock, a branch of which was afterwards raised to the present baronetage. At least I have little doubt such is the case, though I can hardly say I am yet prepared to prove it."

"You don't mean I'm of the same blood as—

as Geoffrey Brotherton!" I said. "I would rather not, if it's the same to you, Charley."

"I can't help it: that's the way things point," he answered, throwing down the parchment. "But I can't read more now. Let's go and have a walk. I'll stop at home to-morrow, and take a look over the whole set."

"I'll stop with you."

"No, you won't. You'll go and get on with your library. I shall do better alone. If I could only get a peep at the Moldwarp chest as well!"

"But the place may have been bought and sold many times. Just look here, though," I said, as I showed him the crest on my watch and seal. "Mind you look at the top of your spoon the next time you eat soup at the Hall."

"That is unnecessary, quite. I recognise the crest at once. How strangely these cryptographs come drifting along the tide, like the gilded ornaments of a wreck after the hull has gone down!"

"Or, like the mole or squint that re-appears in successive generations, the legacy of some

long-forgotten ancestor," I said—and several things unexplained occurred to me as possibly having a common solution.

"I find, however," said Charley, "that the name of Cumbermede is not mentioned in your papers more than about a hundred years back—as far as I have yet made out."

"That is odd," I returned, "seeing that in the same chest we find that book with my name, surname and Christian, and the date 1630."

"It is strange," he acquiesced, "and will perhaps require a somewhat complicated theory to meet it."

We began to talk of other matters, and, naturally enough, soon came to Clara.

Charley was never ready to talk of her—indeed avoided the subject in a way that continued to perplex me.

"I confess to you, Charley," I said, "there is something about her I do not and cannot understand. It seems to me always as if she were—I will not say underhand—but as if she had some object in view—some design upon you——"

"Upon me!" exclaimed Charley, looking at me suddenly and with a face from which all the colour had fled.

"No, no, Charley, not that," I answered, laughing. "I used the word impersonally. I will be more cautious. One would think we had been talking about a witch—or a demon-lady—you are so frightened at the notion of her having you in her eye."

He did not seem altogether relieved, and I caught an uneasy glance seeking my countenance.

"But isn't she charming?" I went on. "It is only to you I could talk about her so. And after all it may be only a fancy."

He kept his face downwards and aside, as if he were pondering and coming to no conclusion. The silence grew and grew until expectation ceased, and when I spoke again it was of something different.

My reader may be certain from all this that I was not in love with Clara. Her beauty and liveliness, with a gaiety which not seldom assumed the form of grace, attracted me much, it is true; but nothing interferes more with the

growth of any passion than a spirit of questioning, and, that once aroused, love begins to cease and pass into pain. Few, perhaps, could have arrived at the point of admiration I had reached without falling instantly therefrom into an abyss of absorbing passion; but with me, inasmuch as I searched every feeling in the hope of finding in it the everlasting, there was in the present case a reiterated check, if not indeed recoil; for I was not and could not make myself sure that Clara was upright;—perhaps the more commonplace word *straightforward* would express my meaning better.

Anxious to get the books arranged before they all left me, for I knew I should have but little heart for it after they were gone, I grudged Charley the forenoon he wanted amongst my papers, and prevailed upon him to go with me the next day as usual. Another fortnight, which was almost the limit of their stay, would, I thought, suffice; and giving up everything else, Charley and I worked from morning till night, with much though desultory assistance from the ladies. I contrived to keep the carpenter and housemaid in work, and by

the end of the week began to see the inroads of order "scattering the rear of darkness thin."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARY OSBORNE.

ALL this time the acquaintance between Mary Osborne and myself had not improved. Save as the sister of my friend I had not, I repeat, found her interesting. She did not seem at all to fulfil the promise of her childhood. Hardly once did she address me; and, when I spoke to her, would reply with a simple, dull directness which indicated nothing beyond the fact of the passing occasion. Rightly or wrongly, I concluded that the more indulgence she cherished for Charley, the less she felt for his friend—that to him she attributed the endlessly sad declension of her darling brother. Once on her face I surprised a look of unutterable sorrow resting on Charley's; but the moment she saw that I observed her, the look died out, and her

face stiffened into its usual dulness and negation. On me she turned only the unenlightened disc of her soul. Mrs. Osborne, whom I seldom saw, behaved with much more kindness, though hardly more cordiality. It was only that she allowed her bright indulgence for Charley to cast the shadow of his image over the faults of his friend; and except by the sadness that dwelt in every line of her sweet face, she did not attract me. I was ever aware of an inward judgment which I did not believe I deserved, and I would turn from her look with a sense of injury which greater love would have changed into keen pain.

Once, however, I did meet a look of sympathy from Mary. On the second Monday of the fortnight I was more anxious than ever to reach the end of my labours, and was in the court, accompanied by Charley, as early as eight o'clock. From the hall a dark passage led past the door of the dining-room to the garden. Through the dark tube of the passage we saw the bright green of a lovely bit of sward, and upon it Mary and Clara, radiant in white morning dresses. We joined them.

"Here come the slave-drivers!" remarked Clara.

"Already!" said Mary, in a low voice, which I thought had a tinge of dismay in its tone.

"Never mind, Polly," said her companion—"we're not going to bow to their will and pleasure. We'll have our walk in spite of them."

As she spoke she threw a glance at us which seemed to say—"You may come if you like;" then turned to Mary with another which said—"We shall see whether they prefer old books or young ladies."

Charley looked at me—interrogatively.

"Do as you like, Charley," I said.

"I will do as you do," he answered.

"Well," I said, "I have no right——"

"Oh! bother!" said Clara. "You're so magnificent always with your rights and wrongs! Are you coming, or are you not?"

"Yes, I'm coming," I replied, convicted by Clara's directness, for I was quite ready to go.

We crossed the court, and strolled through the park, which was of great extent, in the direction of a thick wood, covering a rise towards the east. The morning air was perfectly still;

there was a little dew on the grass, which shone rather than sparkled; the sun was burning through a light fog, which grew deeper as we approached the wood; the decaying leaves filled the air with their sweet, mournful scent. Through the wood went a wide opening or glade, stretching straight and far towards the east, and along this we walked, with that exhilaration which the fading Autumn so strangely bestows. For some distance the ground ascended softly, but the view was finally closed in by a more abrupt swell, over the brow of which the mist hung in dazzling brightness.

Notwithstanding the gaiety of animal spirits produced by the season, I felt unusually depressed that morning. Already, I believe, I was beginning to feel the home-born sadness of the soul whose wings are weary and whose foot can find no firm soil on which to rest. Sometimes I think the wonder is that so many men are never sad. I doubt if Charley would have suffered so but for the wrongs his father's selfish religion had done him; which perhaps were therefore so far well, inasmuch as otherwise he might not have cared enough about religion

even to doubt concerning it. But in my case now, it may have been only the unsatisfying presence of Clara, haunted by a dim regret that I could not love her more than I did. For with regard to her my soul was like one who in a dream of delight sees outspread before him a wide river, wherein he makes haste to plunge that he may disport himself in the fine element; but, wading eagerly, alas! finds not a single pool deeper than his knees.

"What's the matter with you, Wilfrid?" said Charley, who, in the midst of some gay talk, suddenly perceived my silence. "You seem to lose all your spirits away from your precious library. I do believe you grudge every moment not spent upon those ragged old books."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Charley; I was wondering what lies beyond that mist."

"I see!—A chapter of the *Pilgrim's Progress!* Here we are—Mary, you're Christiana, and, Clara, you're Mercy. Wilfrid, you're—what? —I should have said Hopeful any other day, but this morning you look like—let me see—like Mr. Ready-to-Halt. The celestial city lies behind that fog—doesn't it, Christiana?"

"I don't like to hear you talk so, Charley," said his sister, smiling in his face.

"They ain't in the Bible," he returned.

"No—and I shouldn't mind if you were only merry, but you know you are scoffing at the story, and I love it—so I can't be pleased to hear you."

"I beg your pardon, Mary—but your celestial city lies behind such a fog that not one crystal turret, one pearly gate of it was ever seen. At least *we* have never caught a glimmer of it, and must go tramp, tramp—we don't know whither, any more than the blind puppy that has crawled too far from his mother's side."

"I do see the light of it, Charley dear," said Mary, sadly—not as if the light were any great comfort to her at the moment.

"If you do see something—how can you tell what it's the light of? It may come from the city of Dis, for anything you know."

"I don't know what that is."

"Oh! the red-hot city—down below. You will find all about it in Dante."

"It doesn't look like that—the light I see," said Mary, quietly.

"How very ill-bred you are—to say such wicked things, Charley!" said Clara.

"Am I? They *are* better unmentioned. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die! Only don't allude to the unpleasant subject."

He burst out singing: the verses were poor, but I will give them.

"Let the sun shimmer!
Let the wind blow!
All is a notion—
What do we know?
Let the moon glimmer!
Let the stream flow!
All is but motion
To and fro!

Let the rose wither!
Let the stars glow!
Let the rain batter—
Drift sleet and snow!
Bring the tears hither!
Let the smiles go!
What does it matter?
To and fro!

To and fro ever,
Motion and show!
Nothing goes onward—
Hurry or no!
All is one river—
Seaward and so
Up again sunward—
To and fro!

Pendulum sweeping
High, and now low!
That star—*tic*, blot it!
Tac, let it go!
Time he is reaping
Hay for his mow;
That flower—he's got it!
To and fro!

Such a scythe swinging,
Mighty and slow!
Ripping and slaying—
Hey nonny no!
Black Ribs is singing—
Chorus—Hey, ho!
What is he saying—
To and fro?

Singing and saying
'Grass is hay—ho!
Love is a longing;
Water is snow.'
Swinging and swaying,
Toll the bells go!
Dinging and donging
To and fro!"

"Oh, Charley!" said his sister, with suppressed agony, "what a wicked song!"

"It *is* a wicked song," I said. "But I meant——it only represents an unbelieving, hopeless mood."

"*You* wrote it, then!" she said, giving me—

as it seemed, involuntarily—a look of reproach.

"Yes, I did; but——"

"Then I think you are very horrid," said Clara, interrupting.

"Charley!" I said, "you must not leave your sister to think so badly of me! You know why I wrote it—and what I meant."

"I wish I had written it myself," he returned. "I think it splendid. Anybody might envy you that song."

"But you know I didn't mean it for a true one."

"Who knows whether it is true or false?"

"*I* know," said Mary: "I know it is false."

"And *I* hope it," I adjoined.

"Whatever put such horrid things in your head, Wilfrid?" asked Clara.

"Probably the fear lest they should be true. The verses came as I sat in a country church once, not long ago."

"In a church!" exclaimed Mary.

"Oh! he does go to church sometimes," said Charley, with a laugh.

"How could you think of it in church?" persisted Mary.

"It's more like the churchyard," said Clara.

"It was in an old church in a certain desolate sea-forsaken town," I said. "The pendulum of the clock—a huge, long, heavy, slow thing—hangs far down into the church, and goes swing, swang over your head, three or four seconds to every swing. When you have heard the *tic*, your heart grows faint every time between—waiting for the *tac*, which seems as if it would never come."

We were ascending the acclivity, and no one spoke again before we reached the top. There a wide landscape lay stretched before us. The mist was rapidly melting away before the gathering strength of the sun: as we stood and gazed we could see it vanishing. By slow degrees the colours of the Autumn woods dawned out of it. Close under us lay a great wave of gorgeous red—beeches, I think—in the midst of which, here and there, stood up, tall and straight and dark, the unchanging green of a fir-tree. The glow of a hectic death was over the landscape, melting away into the misty fringe of the far horizon. Overhead the sky was blue, with a clear thin blue that

told of withdrawing suns and coming frosts.

"For my part," I said, "I cannot believe that beyond this loveliness there lies no greater. Who knows, Charley, but death may be the first recognizable step of the progress of which you despair?"

It was then I caught the look from Mary's eye, for the sake of which I have recorded the little incidents of the morning. But the same moment the look faded, and the veil or the mask fell over her face.

"I am afraid," she said, "if there has been no progress before, there will be little indeed after."

Now of all things, I hated the dogmatic theology of the party in which she had been brought up, and I turned from her with silent dislike.

"Really," said Clara, "you gentlemen have been very entertaining this morning. One would think Polly and I had come out for a stroll with a couple of undertaker's-men. There's surely time enough to think of such things yet! None of us are at death's door exactly."

"'Sweet remembrancer!'—Who knows?" said Charley.

"'Now I, to comfort him,'" I followed, quoting Mrs. Quickly concerning Sir John Falstaff, "'bid him, 'a should not think of God: I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.'"

"I beg your pardon," said Mary—"there was no word of Him in the matter."

"I see," said Clara: "you meant that at me, Wilfrid. But I assure you I am no heathen. I go to church regularly—once a Sunday when I can, and twice when I can't help it. That's more than you do, Mr. Cumbermede, I suspect."

"What makes you think so?" I asked.

"I can't imagine you enjoying anything but the burial service."

"It is to my mind the most consoling of them all," I answered.

"Well, I haven't reached the point of wanting that consolation yet, thank heaven."

"Perhaps some of us would rather have the consolation than give thanks that we didn't need it," I said.

"I can't say I understand you, but I know you mean something disagreeable. Polly, I think we had better go home to breakfast."

Mary turned, and we all followed. Little was said on the way home. We divided in the hall—the ladies to breakfast, and we to our work.

We had not spoken for an hour, when Charley broke the silence.

"What a brute I am, Wilfrid!" he said. "Why shouldn't I be as good as Jesus Christ? It seems always as if a man might. But just look at me! Because I was miserable myself, I went and made my poor little sister twice as miserable as she was before. She'll never get over what I said this morning."

"It *was* foolish of you, Charley."

"It was brutal. I am the most selfish creature in the world—always taken up with myself. I do believe there is a devil, after all. *I* am *a* devil. And the universal self is *the* devil. If there were such a thing as a self always giving itself away—that self would be God."

"Something very like the God of Christianity, I think."

"If it were so, there would be a chance for us. We might then one day give the finishing blow to the devil in us. But no: *he* does all for his own glory."

"It depends on what his glory is. If what the self-seeking self would call glory, then I agree with you—that is not the God we need. But if his glory should be just the opposite—the perfect giving of himself away—then——. Of course I know nothing about it. My uncle used to say things like that."

He did not reply, and we went on with our work. Neither of the ladies came near us again that day.

Before the end of the week, the library was in tolerable order to the eye, though it could not be perfectly arranged until the commencement of a catalogue should be as the dawn of a consciousness in the half-restored mass.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STORM.

SO many books of rarity and value had revealed themselves, that it was not difficult to make Sir Giles comprehend in some degree the importance of such a possession. He had grown more and more interested as the work went on; and even Lady Brotherton, although she much desired to have, at least, the oldest and most valuable of the books re-bound in red morocco first, was so far satisfied with what she was told concerning the worth of the library, that she determined to invite some of the neighbours to dinner, for the sake of showing it. The main access to it was to be by the armoury; and she had that side of the gallery round the hall which led thither covered with a thick carpet.

Meantime Charley had looked over all the papers in my chest, but, beyond what I have already stated, no fact of special interest had been brought to light.

In sending an invitation to Charley, Lady Brotherton could hardly avoid sending me one as well: I doubt whether I should otherwise have been allowed to enjoy the admiration bestowed on the result of my labours.

The dinner was formal and dreary enough: the geniality of one of the heads of a household is seldom sufficient to give character to an entertainment.

"They tell me you are a buyer of books, Mr. Alderforge," said Mr. Mellon to the clergyman of a neighbouring parish, as we sat over our wine.

"Quite a mistake," returned Mr. Alderforge. "I am a reader of books."

"That of course! But you buy them first—don't you?"

"Not always. I sometimes borrow them."

"That I never do. If a book is worth borrowing, it is worth buying."

"Perhaps—if you can afford it. But many

books that book-buyers value, I count worthless—for all their wide margins and uncut leaves."

"Will you come and have a look at Sir Giles's library?" I ventured to say.

"I never heard of a library at Moldwarp Hall, Sir Giles," said Mr. Mellon.

"I am given to understand there is a very valuable one," said Mr. Alderforge. "I shall be glad to accompany you, sir," he added, turning to me, "—if Sir Giles will allow us."

"You cannot have a better guide than Mr. Cumbermede," said Sir Giles. "I am indebted to him almost for the discovery—altogether for the restoration of the library."

"Assisted by Miss Brotherton and her friends, Sir Giles," I said.

"A son of Mr. Cumbermede of Lowdon Farm, I presume?" said Alderforge, bowing interrogatively.

"A nephew," I answered.

"He was a most worthy man.—By the way, Sir Giles, your young friend here must be a distant connection of your own. I found in some

book or other lately, I forget where at the moment, that there were Cumbermedes at one time in Moldwarp Hall."

"Yes—about two hundred years ago, I believe. It passed to our branch of the family some time during the troubles of the seventeenth century—I hardly know how—I am not much of an historian."

I thought of my precious volume, and the name on the title-page. That book might have been in the library of Moldwarp Hall. If so, how had it strayed into my possession—alone, yet more to me than all that was left behind?

We betook ourselves to the library. The visitors expressed themselves astonished at its extent, and the wealth which even a glance revealed—for I took care to guide their notice to its richest veins.

"When it is once arranged," I said, "I fancy there will be few private libraries to stand a comparison with it—I am thinking of old English literature, and old editions: there is not a single volume of the present century in it, so far as I know."

I had had a few old sconces fixed here and there, but as yet there were no means of really lighting the rooms. Hence, when a great flash of lightning broke from a cloud that hung over the park right in front of the windows, it flooded them with a dazzling splendour. I went to find Charley, for the library was the best place to see the lightning from. As I entered the drawing-room, a tremendous peal of thunder burst over the house, causing so much consternation amongst the ladies, that, for the sake of company, they all followed to the library. Clara seemed more frightened than any. Mary was perfectly calm. Charley was much excited. The storm grew in violence. We saw the lightning strike a tree which stood alone a few hundred yards from the house. When the next flash came, half of one side seemed torn away. The wind rose, first in fierce gusts, then into a tempest, and the rain poured in torrents.

"None of you can go home to-night, ladies," said Sir Giles. "You must make up your minds to stop where you are. Few horses would face such a storm as that."

"It would be to tax your hospitality too grievously, Sir Giles," said Mr. Alderforge. "I daresay it will clear up by-and-by, or at least moderate sufficiently to let us get home."

"I don't think there's much chance of that," returned Sir Giles. "The barometer has been steadily falling for the last three days. My dear, you had better give your orders at once."

"You had better stop, Charley," I said.

"I won't if you go," he returned.

Clara was beside.

"You must not think of going," she said.

Whether she spoke to him or me, I did not know, but as Charley made no answer—

"I cannot stop without being asked," I said, "and it is not likely that any one will take the trouble to ask me."

The storm increased. At the request of the ladies, the gentlemen left the library and accompanied them to the drawing-room for tea. Our hostess asked Clara to sing, but she was too frightened to comply.

"You will sing, Mary, if Lady Brotherton asks you, I know," said Mrs. Osborne.

"Do, my dear," said Lady Brotherton; and Mary at once complied.

I had never heard her sing, and did not expect much. But although she had little execution, there was, I found, a wonderful charm both in her voice and the simplicity of her mode. I did not feel this at first, nor could I tell when the song began to lay hold upon me, but when it ceased, I found that I had been listening intently. I have often since tried to recall it, but as yet it has eluded all my efforts. I still cherish the hope that it may return some night in a dream, or in some waking moment of quiescent thought, when what we call the brain works as it were of itself, and the spirit allows it play.

The close was lost in a louder peal of thunder than had yet burst. Charley and I went again to the library to look out on the night. It was dark as pitch, except when the lightning broke and revealed everything for one intense moment.

"I think sometimes," said Charley, "that death will be like one of those flashes, revealing everything in hideous fact—for just one moment and no more."

"How for one moment and no more, Charley?" I asked.

"Because the sight of the truth concerning itself must kill the soul, if there be one, with disgust at its own vileness, and the miserable contrast between its aspirations and attainments, its pretences and its efforts. At least, that would be the death fit for a life like mine—a death of disgust at itself. We claim immortality; we cringe and cower with the fear that immortality may *not* be the destiny of man; and yet we—*I*—do things unworthy not merely of immortality, but unworthy of the butterfly existence of a single day in such a world as this sometimes seems to be. Just think how I stabbed at my sister's faith this morning—careless of making her as miserable as myself! Because my father has put into her mind his fancies, and I hate them, I wound again the heart which they wound, and which cannot help their presence!"

"But the heart that can be sorry for an action is far above the action, just as her heart is better than the notions that haunt it."

"Sometimes I hope so. But action deter-

mines character. And it is all such a muddle! I don't care much about what they call immortality. I doubt if it is worth the having. I would a thousand times rather have one day of conscious purity of heart and mind and soul and body, than an eternity of such life as I have now.——What am I saying?" he added, with a despairing laugh. "It is a fool's comparison; for an eternity of the former would be bliss—one moment of the latter is misery."

I could but admire and pity my poor friend both at once.

Miss Pease had entered unheard.

"Mr. Cumbermede," she said, "I have been looking for you to show you your room. It is not the one I should like to have got for you, but Mrs. Wilson says you have occupied it before, and I daresay you will find it comfortable enough."

"Thank you, Miss Pease. I am sorry you should have taken the trouble. I can go home well enough. I am not afraid of a little rain."

"A little rain!" said Charley, trying to speak lightly.

"Well, any amount of rain," I said.

"But the lightning!" expostulated Miss Pease in a timid voice.

"I am something of a fatalist, Miss Pease," I said. "'Every bullet has its billet,' you know. Besides, if I had a choice, I think I would rather die by lightning than any other way."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Cumbermede.—Oh! what a flash!"

"I was not speaking irreverently, I assure you," I replied.—"I think I had better set out at once, for there seems no chance of its clearing."

"I am sure Sir Giles would be distressed it you did."

"He will never know, and I dislike giving trouble."

"The room is ready. I will show you where it is, that you may go when you like."

"If Mrs. Wilson says it is a room I have occupied before, I know the way quite well."

"There are two ways to it," she said. "But of course one of them is enough," she added with a smile. "Mr. Osborne, your room is in another part quite."

"I know where my sister's room is," said Charley. "Is it anywhere near hers?"

"That is the room you are to have. Miss Osborne is to be with your mamma, I think. There is plenty of accommodation, only the notice was short."

I began to button my coat.

"Don't go, Wilfrid," said Charley. "You might give offence. Besides, you will have the advantage of getting to work as early as you please in the morning."

It was late and I was tired—consequently less inclined than usual to encounter a storm, for in general I enjoyed being in any commotion of the elements. Also I felt I should like to pass another night in that room, and have besides the opportunity of once more examining at my leisure the gap in the tapestry.

"Will you meet me early in the library, Charley?" I said.

"Yes—to be sure I will—as early as you like."

"Let us go to the drawing-room, then."

"Why should you, if you are tired, and want to go to bed?"

"Because Lady Brotherton will not like my

being included in the invitation. She will think it absurd of me not to go home."

"There is no occasion to go near her, then."

"I do not choose to sleep in the house without knowing that she knows it."

We went. I made my way to Lady Brotherton. Clara was standing near her.

"I am much obliged by your hospitality, Lady Brotherton," I said. "It is rather a rough night to encounter in evening dress."

She bowed.

"The distance is not great, however," I said, "and perhaps——"

"Out of the question!" said Sir Giles, who came up at the moment.

"Will you see, then, Sir Giles, that a room is prepared for your guest?" she said.

"I trust that is unnecessary," he replied. "I gave orders."—But as he spoke he went towards the bell.

"It is all arranged, I believe, Sir Giles," I said. "Mrs. Wilson has already informed me which is my room. Good night, Sir Giles."

He shook hands with me kindly. I bowed to Lady Brotherton and retired.

It may seem foolish to record such mere froth of conversation, but I want my reader to understand how a part, at least, of the family of Moldwarp Hall regarded me.

CHAPTER XX.

A DREAM.

MY room looked dreary enough. There was no fire, and the loss of the patch of tapestry from the wall gave the whole an air of dilapidation. The wind howled fearfully in the chimney and about the door on the roof, and the rain came down on the leads like the distant trampling of many horses. But I was not in an imaginative mood. Charley was again my trouble. I could not bear him to be so miserable. Why was I not as miserable as he, I asked myself. Perhaps I ought to be, for although certainly I hoped more, I could not say I believed more than he. I wished more than ever that I did believe, for then I should be able to help him—I was sure of that; but I saw no possible way of arriving at belief. Where

was the proof? Where even the hope of a growing probability?

With these thoughts drifting about in my brain, like waifs which the tide will not let go, I was poring over the mutilated forms of the tapestry round the denuded door, with an expectation, almost a conviction, that I should find the fragment still hanging on the wall of the kitchen at the Moat, the very piece wanted to complete the broken figures. When I had them well fixed in my memory, I went to bed, and lay pondering over the several broken links which indicated some former connection between the Moat and the Hall, until I fell asleep, and began to dream strange wild dreams, of which the following was the last.

I was in a great palace, wandering hither and thither, and meeting no one. A weight of silence brooded in the place. From hall to hall I went, along corridor and gallery, and up and down endless stairs. I knew that in some room near me was one whose name was Athanasia,—a maiden, I thought in my dream, whom I had known and loved for years, but had lately lost —I knew not how. Somewhere here she was,

if only I could find her! From room to room I went seeking her. Every room I entered bore some proof that she had just been there—but there she was not. In one lay a veil, in another a handkerchief, in a third a glove; and all were scented with a strange entrancing odour, which I had never known before, but which in certain moods I can to this day imperfectly recall. I followed and followed until hope failed me utterly, and I sat down and wept. But while I wept, hope dawned afresh, and I rose and again followed the quest, until I found myself in a little chapel like that of Moldwarp Hall. It was filled with the sound of an organ, distance-faint, and the thin music was the same as the odour of the handkerchief which I carried in my bosom. I tried to follow the sound, but the chapel grew and grew as I wandered, and I came no nearer to its source. At last the altar rose before me on my left, and through the bowed end of the aisle I passed behind it into the lady-chapel. There against the outer wall stood a dusky ill-defined shape. Its head rose above the sill of the eastern window, and I saw it against the rising moon.

But that and the whole figure were covered with a thick drapery; I could see nothing of the face, and distinguish little of the form.

"What art thou?" I asked trembling.

"I am Death—dost thou not know me?" answered the figure, in a sweet though worn and weary voice. "Thou hast been following me all thy life, and hast followed me hither."

Then I saw through the lower folds of the cloudy garment, which grew thin and gauze-like as I gazed, a huge iron door, with folding leaves, and a great iron bar across them.

"Art thou at thy own door?" I asked. "Surely thy house cannot open under the eastern window of the church?"

"Follow and see," answered the figure.

Turning, it drew back the bolt, threw wide the portals, and low-stooping entered. I followed, not into the moonlit night, but through a cavernous opening into darkness. If my Athanasia were down with Death, I would go with Death, that I might at least end with her. Down and down I followed the veiled figure, down flight after flight of stony stairs, through passages like those of the catacombs,

and again down steep straight stairs. At length it stopped at another gate, and with beating heart I heard what I took for bony fingers fumbling with a chain and a bolt. But ere the fastenings had yielded, once more I heard the sweet odour-like music of the distant organ. The same moment the door opened, but I could see nothing for some time for the mighty inburst of a lovely light. A fair river, brimming full, its little waves flashing in the sun and wind, washed the threshold of the door, and over its surface, hither and thither, sped the white sails of shining boats, while from somewhere, clear now, but still afar, came the sound of a great organ psalm. Beyond the river the sun was rising—over blue Summer hills that melted into blue Summer sky. On the threshold stood my guide, bending towards me, as if waiting for me to pass out also. I lifted my eyes: the veil had fallen—it was my lost Athanasia! Not one beam touched her face, for her back was to the sun, yet her face was radiant. Trembling, I would have kneeled at her feet, but she stepped out upon the flowing river, and with the sweetest of sad smiles, drew the door to,

and left me alone in the dark hollow of the earth. I broke into a convulsive weeping, and awoke.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WAKING.

I SUPPOSE I awoke tossing in my misery, for my hand fell upon something cold. I started up and tried to see. The light of a clear morning of late Autumn had stolen into the room while I slept, and glimmered on something that lay upon the bed. It was some time before I could believe that my troubled eyes were not the sport of one of those odd illusions that come of mingled sleep and waking. But by the golden hilt and rusted blade I was at length convinced, although the scabbard was gone, that I saw my own sword. It lay by my left side, with the hilt towards my hand. But the moment I turned a little to take it in my right hand, I forgot all about it in a far more be-

wildering discovery, which fixed me staring half in terror, half in amazement, so that again for a moment I disbelieved in my waking condition. On the other pillow lay the face of a lovely girl. I felt as if I had seen it before—whether only in the just vanished dream, I could not tell. But the maiden of my dream never comes back to me with any other features or with any other expression than those which I now beheld. There was an ineffable mingling of love and sorrow on the sweet countenance. The girl was dead asleep, but evidently dreaming, for tears were flowing from under her closed lids. For a time I was unable even to think; when thought returned, I was afraid to move. All at once the face of Mary Osborne dawned out of the vision before me—how different, how glorified from its waking condition! It was perfectly lovely—transfigured by the unchecked outflow of feeling. The recognition brought me to my senses at once. I did not waste a single thought in speculating how the mistake had occurred, for there was not a moment to be lost. I must be wise to shield her, and chiefly, as much as might be, from the miserable confusion which her own

discovery of the untoward fact would occasion her. At first I thought it would be best to lie perfectly still, in order that she, at length awaking and discovering where she was, but finding me fast asleep, might escape with the conviction that the whole occurrence remained her own secret. I made the attempt, but I need hardly say that never before or since have I found myself in a situation half so perplexing; and in a few moments I was seized with such a trembling that I was compelled to turn my thoughts to the only other possible plan. As I reflected, the absolute necessity of attempting it became more and more apparent. In the first place, when she woke and saw me, she might scream and be heard: in the next, she might be seen as she left the room, or, unable to find her way, might be involved in great consequent embarrassment. But, if I could gather all my belongings, and, without awaking her, escape by the stair to the roof, she would be left to suppose that she had but mistaken her chamber, and would, I hoped, remain in ignorance that she had not passed the night in it alone. I dared one more peep into her face. The light and the loveliness of her

dream had passed; I should not now have had to look twice to know that it was Mary Osborne; but never more could I see in hers a common face. She was still fast asleep, and, stealthy as a beast of prey, I began to make my escape. At the first movement, however, my perplexity was redoubled, for again my hand fell on the sword which I had forgotten, and question after question as to how they were together, and together there, darted through my bewildered brain. Could a third person have come and laid the sword between us? I had no time, however, to answer one of my own questions. Hardly knowing which was better, or if there was *a better*, I concluded to take the weapon with me, moved in part by the fact that I had found it where I had lost it, but influenced far more by its association with this night of marvel.

Having gathered my garments together, and twice glanced around me—once to see that I left nothing behind, and once to take farewell of the peaceful face, which had never moved, I opened the little door in the wall, and made my strange retreat up the stair. My heart was beating so violently from the fear of her waking,

that, when the door was drawn to behind me, I had to stand for what seemed minutes before I was able to ascend the steep stair, and step from its darkness into the clear frosty shine of the Autumn sun, brilliant upon the leads wet with the torrents of the preceding night.

I found a sheltered spot by the chimney-stack, where no one could see me from below, and proceeded to dress myself—assisted in my very imperfect toilet by the welcome discovery of a pool of rain in a depression of the lead-covered roof. But alas, before I had finished, I found that I had brought only one of my shoes away with me! This settled the question I was at the moment debating—whether, namely, it would be better to go home, or to find some way of reaching the library. I put my remaining shoe in my pocket, and set out to discover a descent. It would have been easy to get down into the little gallery, but it communicated on both sides immediately with bed-rooms, which for anything I knew might be occupied; and besides I was unwilling to enter the house for fear of encountering some of the domestics. But I knew more of the place now, and had

often speculated concerning the odd position and construction of an outside stair in the first court, close to the chapel, with its landing at the door of a room *en suite* with those of Sir Giles and Lady Brotherton. It was for a man an easy drop to this landing. Quiet as a cat, I crept over the roof, let myself down, crossed the court swiftly, drew back the bolt which alone secured the wicket, and, with no greater mishap than the unavoidable wetting of shoeless feet, was soon safe in my own room, exchanging my evening for a morning dress. When I looked at my watch, I found it nearly seven o'clock.

I was so excited and bewildered by the adventures I had gone through, that, from very commonness, all the things about me looked alien and strange. I had no feeling of relation to the world of ordinary life. The first thing I did was to hang my sword in its own old place, and the next to take down the bit of tapestry from the opposite wall, which I proceeded to examine in the light of my recollection of that round the denuded door. Room was left for not even a single doubt as to the relation be-

tween this and that: they had been wrought in one and the same piece by fair fingers of some long vanished time.

CHAPTER XXII.

A TALK ABOUT SUICIDE.

IN the same excited mood, but repressing it with all the energy I could gather, I returned to the Hall, and made my way to the library. There Charley soon joined me.

"Why didn't you come to breakfast?" he asked.

"I've been home, and changed my clothes," I answered. "I couldn't well appear in a tail-coat. It's bad enough to have to wear such an ugly thing by candle-light."

"What's the matter with you?" he asked again, after an interval of silence, which I judge from the question must have been rather a long one.

"What *is* the matter with me, Charley?"

"I can't tell. You don't seem yourself somehow."

I do not know what answer I gave him, but I knew myself what was the matter with me well enough. The form and face of the maiden of my dream, the Athanasia lost that she might be found, blending with the face and form of Mary Osborne, filled my imagination so that I could think of nothing else. Gladly would I have been rid of even Charley's company, that, while my hands were busy with the books, my heart might brood at will now upon the lovely dream, now upon the lovely vision to which I awoke from it, and which, had it not glided into the forms of the foregone dream, and possessed it with itself, would have banished it altogether. At length I was aware of light steps and sweet voices in the next room, and Mary and Clara presently entered.

How came it that the face of the one had lost the half of its radiance, and the face of the other had gathered all that the former had lost. Mary's countenance was as still as ever; there was not in it a single ray of light beyond its usual expression; but I had become more capa-

ble of reading it, for the coalescence of the face of my dream with her dreaming face had given me its key; and I was now so far from indifferent, that I was afraid to look for fear of betraying the attraction I now found it exercise over me. Seldom surely has a man been so long familiar with and careless of any countenance to find it all at once an object of absorbing interest! The very fact of its want of revelation added immensely to its power over me now—for was I not in its secret? Did I not know what a lovely soul hid behind that unexpressive countenance? Did I not know that it was as the veil of the holy of holies, at times reflecting only the light of the seven golden lamps in the holy place; at others almost melted away in the rush of the radiance unspeakable from the hidden and holier side—the region whence come the revelations. To draw through it, if but once, the feeblest glimmer of the light I had but once beheld, seemed an ambition worthy of a life. Knowing her power of reticence, however, and of withdrawing from the outer courts into the penetralia of her sanctuary, guessing also at something of the aspect in

which she regarded me, I dared not now make any such attempt. But I resolved to seize what opportunity might offer of convincing her that I was not so far out of sympathy with her as to be unworthy of holding closer converse; and I now began to feel distressed at what had given me little trouble before, namely, that she should suppose me the misleader of her brother, while I knew that, however far I might be from an absolute belief in things which she seemed never to have doubted, I was yet in some measure the means of keeping him from flinging aside the last cords which held him to the faith of his fathers. But I would not lead in any such direction, partly from the fear of hypocrisy, partly from horror at the idea of making capital of what little faith I had. But Charley himself afforded me an opportunity which I could not, whatever my scrupulosity, well avoid.

"Have you ever looked into that little book, Charley?" I said, finding in my hands an early edition of the *Christian Morals* of Sir Thomas Browne.—I wanted to say something, that I might not appear distraught.

"No," he answered, with indifference, as he glanced at the title-page. "Is it anything particular?"

"Everything he writes, however whimsical in parts, is well worth more than mere reading," I answered. "It is a strangely latinized style, but has its charm notwithstanding."

He was turning over the leaves as I spoke. Receiving no response, I looked up. He seemed to have come upon something which had attracted him.

"What have you found?" I asked.

"Here's a chapter on the easiest way of putting a stop to it all," he answered.

"What do you mean?"

"He was a medical man—wasn't he? I'm ashamed to say I know nothing about him."

"Yes, certainly he was."

"Then he knew what he was about."

"As well probably as any man of his profession at the time."

"He recommends drowning," said Charley, without raising his eyes from the book.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean for suicide."

"Nonsense. He was the last man to favour that. You must make a mistake. He was a thoroughly Christian man."

"I know nothing about that. Hear this."

He read the following passages from the beginning of the thirteenth section of the second part.

"With what shifts and pains we come into the world, we remember not; but 'tis commonly found no easy matter to get out of it. Many have studied to exasperate the ways of death, but fewer hours have been spent to soften that necessity."—"Ovid, the old heroes, and the Stoicks, who were so afraid of drowning, as dreading thereby the extinction of their soul, which they conceived to be a fire, stood probably in fear of an easier way of death; wherein the water, entering the possessions of air, makes a temporary suffocation, and kills as it were without a fever. Surely many, who have had the spirit to destroy themselves, have not been ingenious in the contrivance thereof."—"Cato is much to be pitied, who mangled himself with poniards; and Hannibal seems more subtle, who carried his delivery, not in the point but the pummel of his sword."

"Poison, I suppose," he said, as he ended the extract.

"Yes, that's the story, if you remember," I answered; "but I don't see that Sir Thomas is favouring suicide. Not at all. What he writes there is merely a speculation on the comparative ease of different modes of dying. Let me see it."

I took the book from his hands, and, glancing over the essay, read the closing passage.

"But to learn to die, is better than to study the ways of dying. Death will find some ways to untie or cut the most gordian knots of life, and make men's miseries as mortal as themselves: whereas evil spirits, as undying substances, are unseparable from their calamities; and, therefore, they everlastingly struggle under their angustias, and, bound up with immortality, can never get out of themselves."

"There! I told you so!" cried Charley. "Don't you see? He is the most cunning arguer—beats Despair in the *Fairy Queen* hollow!"

By this time, either attracted by the stately

flow of Sir Thomas's speech, or by the tone of our disputation, the two girls had drawn nearer, and were listening.

"What *do* you mean, Charley?" I said, perceiving, however, the hold I had by my further quotation given him.

"First of all, he tells you the easiest way of dying, and then informs you that it ends all your troubles. He is too cunning to say in so many words that there is no hereafter, but what else can he wish you to understand when he says that in dying we have the advantage over the evil spirits, who cannot by death get rid of their sufferings? I will read this book," he added, closing it and putting it in his pocket.

"I wish you would," I said: "for although I confess you are logically right in your conclusions, I know Sir Thomas did not mean anything of the sort. He was only misled by his love of antithesis into a hasty and illogical remark. The whole tone of his book is against such a conclusion. Besides I do not doubt he was thinking only of good people, for whom he believed all suffering over at their death."

"But I don't see, supposing he does believe

in immortality, why you should be so anxious about his orthodoxy on the other point. Didn't Dr. Donne, as good a man as any, I presume, argue on the part of the suicide?"

"I have not read Dr. Donne's essay, but I suspect the obliquity of it has been much exaggerated."

"Why should you? I never saw any argument worth the name on the other side. We have plenty of expressions of horror—but those are not argument. Indeed, the mass of the vulgar are so afraid of dying that, apparently in terror lest suicide should prove infectious, they treat in a brutal manner the remains of the man who has only had the courage to free himself from a burden too hard for him to bear. It is all selfishness—nothing else. They love their paltry selves so much that they count it a greater sin to kill oneself than to kill another man—which seems to me absolutely devilish. Therefore, the *vox populi*, whether it be the *vox Dei* or not, is not nonsense merely, but absolute wickedness. Why shouldn't a man kill himself?"

Clara was looking on rather than listening,

and her interest seemed that of amusement only. Mary's eyes were wide-fixed on the face of Charley, evidently tortured to find that to the other enormities of his unbelief was to be added the justification of suicide. His habit of arguing was doubtless well enough known to her to leave room for the mitigating possibility that he might be arguing only for argument's sake, but what he said could not but be shocking to her upon any supposition.

I was not ready with an answer. Clara was the first to speak.

"It's a cowardly thing, anyhow," she said.

"How do you make that out, Miss Clara?" asked Charley. "I'm aware it's the general opinion, but I don't see it myself."

"It's surely cowardly to run away in that fashion."

"For my part," returned Charley, "I feel that it requires more courage than *I*'ve got, and hence it comes, I suppose, that I admire anyone who has the pluck."

"What vulgar words you use, Mr. Charles!" said Clara.

"Besides," he went on, heedless of her remark, "a man may want to escape—not from his duties—he mayn't know what they are—but from his own weakness and shame."

"But, Charley dear," said Mary, with a great light in her eyes, and the rest of her face as still as a sunless pond, "you don't think of the sin of it. I know you are only talking, but some things oughtn't to be talked of lightly."

"What makes it a sin? It's not mentioned in the ten commandments," said Charley.

"Surely it's against the will of God, Charley dear."

"He hasn't said anything about it, anyhow. And why should I have a thing forced upon me whether I will or not, and then be pulled up for throwing it away when I found it troublesome?"

"Surely I don't quite understand you, Charley."

"Well, if I must be more explicit—I was never asked whether I chose to be made or not. I never had the conditions laid before me. Here I am, and I can't help myself—so far, I mean, as that here I am."

"But life is a good thing," said Mary, evi-

dently struggling with an almost overpowering horror.

"I don't know that. My impression is that if I had been asked——"

"But that couldn't be, you know."

"Then it wasn't fair. But why couldn't I be made for a moment or two, long enough to have the thing laid before me, and be asked whether I would accept it or not? My impression is that I would have said—No, thank you; that is, if it was fairly put."

I hastened to offer a remark, in the hope of softening the pain such flippancy must cause her.

"And my impression is, Charley," I said, "that if such had been possible——"

"Of course," he interrupted, "the God you believe in could have made me for a minute or two. He can, I suppose, unmake me now when he likes."

"Yes; but could he have made you all at once capable of understanding his plans, and your own future? Perhaps that is what he is doing now—making you, by all you are going through, capable of understanding them. Cer-

tainly the question could not have been put to you before you were able to comprehend it, and this may be the only way to make you able. Surely a being who *could* make you had a right to risk the chance, if I may be allowed such an expression, of your being satisfied in the end with what he saw to be good—so good indeed that, if we accept the New Testament story, he would have been willing to go through the same troubles himself for the same end."

"No, no; not the same troubles," he objected. "According to the story to which you refer, Jesus Christ was free from all that alone makes life unendurable—the bad inside you, that will come outside whether you will or not."

"I admit your objection. As to the evil coming out, I suspect it is better it should come out, so long as it is there. But the end is not yet; and still I insist the probability is that, if you could know it all now, you would say with submission, if not with hearty concurrence—'Thy will be done'."

"I have known people who could say that without knowing it all now, Mr. Cumbermede," said Mary.

I had often called her by her Christian name, but she had never accepted the familiarity.

"No doubt," said Charley, "but *I*'m not one of those."

"If you would but give in," said his sister, "you would—in the end, I mean—say, 'It is well.' I am sure of that."

"Yes—perhaps I might—after all the suffering had been forced upon me, and was over at last—when I had been thoroughly exhausted and cowed, that is."

"Which wouldn't satisfy any thinking soul, Charley—much less God," I said. "But if there be a God at all——"

Mary gave a slight inarticulate cry.

"Dear Miss Osborne," I said, "I beg you will not misunderstand me. I cannot be sure about it, as you are—I wish I could—but I am not disputing it in the least; I am only trying to make my argument as strong as I can.—I was going to say to Charley—not to you—that, if there be a God, he would not have compelled us to be, except with the absolute foreknowledge that, when we knew all about it, we would certainly declare ourselves ready to go through it

all again if need should be, in order to attain the known end of his high calling."

"But isn't it very presumptuous to assert anything about God which he has not revealed in his Word?" said Mary, in a gentle, subdued voice, and looking at me with a sweet doubtfulness in her eyes.

"I am only insisting on the perfection of God—as far as I can understand perfection," I answered.

"But may not the perfection of God be something very different from anything we *can* understand?"

"I will go further," I returned. "It *must* be something that we cannot understand—but different from what we can understand by being greater, not by being less."

"Mayn't it be such that we can't understand it at all?" she insisted.

"Then how should we ever worship him? How should we ever rejoice in him? Surely it is because you see God to be good——"

"Or fancy you do," interposed Charley.

"Or fancy you do," I assented, "that you love him—not merely because you are told he is

good. The Fejee islander might assert his God to be good, but would that make you love him? If you heard that a great power, away somewhere, who had nothing to do with you at all, was very good, would that make you able to love him?"

"Yes, it would," said Mary, decidedly. "It is only a good man who would see that God was good."

"There you argue entirely on my side. It must be because you supposed his goodness what you call goodness—not something else—that you could love him on testimony. But even then your love could not be of that mighty absorbing kind which alone you would think fit between you and your God. It would not be loving him with all your heart and soul and strength and mind—would it? It would be loving him second-hand—not because of himself, seen and known by yourself."

"But Charley does not even love God second-hand," she said, with a despairing mournfulness.

"Perhaps because he is very anxious to love him first-hand, and what you tell him about

God does not seem to him to be good. Surely neither man nor woman can love because of what seems not good! I confess one may love in spite of what is bad, but it must be because of other things that are good."

She was silent.

"However goodness may change its forms," I went on, "it must still be goodness; only if we are to adore it, we must see something of what it is—of itself. And the goodness we cannot see, the eternal goodness, high above us as the heavens are above the earth, must still be a goodness that includes, absorbs, elevates, purifies all our goodness, not tramples upon it and calls it wickedness. For if not such, then we have nothing in common with God, and what we call goodness is not of God. He has not even ordered it; or, if he has, he has ordered it only to order the contrary afterwards; and there is, in reality, no real goodness—at least in him; and, if not in him, of whom we spring—where then?—and what becomes of ours, poor as it is?"

My reader will see that I had already thought much about these things; although, I suspect,

I have now not only expressed them far better than I could have expressed them in conversation, but with a degree of clearness which must be owing to the further continuance of the habit of reflecting on these and cognate subjects. Deep in my mind, however, something like this lay; and in some manner like this I tried to express it.

Finding that she continued silent, and that Charley did not appear inclined to renew the contest, anxious also to leave no embarrassing silence to choke the channel now open between us—I mean Mary and myself—I returned to the original question.

"It seems to me, Charley—and it follows from all we have been saying—that the sin of suicide lies just in this, that it is an utter want of faith in God. I confess I do not see any other ground on which to condemn it—provided, always, that the man has no other dependent upon him, none for whom he ought to live and work."

"But does a man owe nothing to himself?" said Clara.

"Nothing that I know of," I replied. "I am

under no obligation to myself. How can I divide myself, and say that the one-half of me is indebted to the other? To my mind, it is a mere fiction of speech."

"But whence, then, should such a fiction arise?" objected Charley, willing, perhaps, to defend Clara.

"From the dim sense of a real obligation, I suspect—the object of which is mistaken. I suspect it really springs from our relation to the unknown God, so vaguely felt that a false form is readily accepted for its embodiment by a being who, in ignorance of its nature, is yet aware of its presence. I mean that what seems an obligation to self is in reality a dimly apprehended duty—an obligation to the unknown God, and not to self, in which lies no causing, therefore no obligating power."

"But why say *the unknown God*, Mr. Cumbermede?" asked Mary.

"Because I do not believe that any one who knew him could possibly attribute to himself what belonged to Him—could, I mean, talk of an obligation to himself, when that obligation was to God."

How far Mary Osborne followed the argument or agreed with it I cannot tell, but she gave me a look of something like gratitude, and my heart felt too big for its closed chamber.

At this moment the housemaid who had, along with the carpenter, assisted me in the library, entered the room. She was rather a forward girl, and I suppose presumed on our acquaintance to communicate directly with myself instead of going to the housekeeper. Seeing her approach as if she wanted to speak to me, I went to meet her. She handed me a small ring, saying, in a low voice,

"I found this in your room, sir, and thought it better to bring it to you."

"Thank you," I said, putting it at once on my little finger; "I am glad you found it."

Charley and Clara had begun talking. I believe Clara was trying to make Charley give her the book he had pocketed, imagining it really of the character he had, half in sport, professed to believe it. But Mary had caught sight of the ring, and, with a bewildered expression on her countenance, was making a

step towards me. I put a finger to my lips, and gave her a look by which I succeeded in arresting her. Utterly perplexed, I believe, she turned away towards the bookshelves behind her. I went into the next room, and called Charley.

"I think we had better not go on with this talk," I said. "You are very imprudent indeed, Charley, to be always bringing up subjects that tend to widen the gulf between you and your sister. When I have a chance, I do what I can to make her doubt whether you are so far wrong as they think you, but you must give her time. All your kind of thought is so new to her that your words cannot possibly convey to her what is in your mind. If only she were not so afraid of me! But I think she begins to trust me a little."

"It's no use," he returned. "Her head is so full of rubbish!"

"But her heart is so full of goodness!"

"I wish you could make anything of her! But she looks up to my father with such a blind adoration that it isn't of the slightest use attempting to put an atom of sense into her."

"I should indeed despair if I might only set about it after your fashion. You always seem to shut your eyes to the mental condition of those that differ from you. Instead of trying to understand them first, which gives the sole possible chance of your ever making them understand what you mean, you care only to present your opinions; and that you do in such a fashion that they must appear to them false. You even make yourself seem to hold these for very love of their untruth; and thus make it all but impossible for them to shake off their fetters: every truth in advance of what they have already learned, will henceforth come to them associated with your presumed backsliding and impenitence."

"Goodness! where did you learn their slang?" cried Charley. "But impenitence, if you like,—not blacksliding. I never made any *profession*. After all, however, their opinions don't seem to hurt them—I mean my mother and sister."

"They must hurt them if only by hindering their growth. In time, of course, the angels of the heart will expel the demons of the brain;

but it is a pity the process should be retarded by your behaviour."

"I know I am a brute, Wilfrid. I *will* try to hold my tongue."

"Depend upon it," I went on, "whatever such hearts can believe, is, as believed by them, to be treated with respect. It is because of the truth in it, not because of the falsehood, that they hold it; and when you speak against the false in it, you appear to them to speak against the true; for the dogma seems to them an unanalyzable unit. You assail the false with the recklessness of falsehood itself, careless of the injury you may inflict on the true."

I was interrupted by the entrance of Clara.

"If you gentlemen don't want us any more, we had better go," she said.

I left Charley to answer her, and went back into the next room. Mary stood where I had left her, mechanically shifting and arranging the volumes on a shelf at the height of her eyes.

"I think this is your ring, Miss Osborne," I said, in a low and hurried tone, offering it.

Her expression at first was only of questioning surprise, when suddenly something seemed to cross her mind; she turned pale as death, and put her hand on the bookshelves as if to support her; as suddenly flushed crimson for a moment, and again turned deadly pale—all before I could speak.

"Don't ask me any questions, dear Miss Osborne," I said. "And, please, trust me this far; don't mention the loss of your ring to any one, unless it be your mother. Allow me to put it on your finger."

She gave me a glance I cannot and would not describe. It lies treasured—for ever, God grant!—in the secret jewel-house of my heart. She lifted a trembling left hand, and doubtingly held—half held it towards me. To this day I know nothing of the stones of that ring—not even their colour; but I know I should know it at once if I saw it. My hand trembled more than hers as I put it on the third finger.

What followed, I do not know. I think I left her there and went into the other room. When I returned a little after, I know she was gone.

From that hour, not one word has ever passed between us in reference to the matter. The best of my conjectures remains but a conjecture; I know how the sword got there—nothing more.

I did not see her again that day, and did not seem to want to see her, but worked on amongst the books in a quiet exultation. My being seemed tenfold awake and alive. My thoughts dwelt on the rarely revealed loveliness of my *Athanasia;* and, although I should have scorned unspeakably to take the smallest advantage of having come to share a secret with her, I could not help rejoicing in the sense of nearness to and *alone-ness* with her which the possession of that secret gave me; while one of the most precious results of the new love which had thus all at once laid hold upon me, was the feeling—almost a conviction—that the dream was not a web self-wove in the loom of my brain, but that from somewhere, beyond my soul even, an influence had mingled with its longings to in-form the vision of that night—to be as it were a creative soul to what would otherwise have been but loose, chaotic, and shapeless vagaries

of the unguided imagination. The events of that night were as the sudden opening of a door through which I caught a glimpse of that region of the supernal in which, whatever might be her theories concerning her experiences therein, Mary Osborne certainly lived, if ever anyone lived. The degree of God's presence with a creature is not to be measured by that creature's interpretation of the manner in which he is revealed. The great question is whether he is revealed or not; and a strong truth can carry many parasitical errors.

I felt that now I could talk freely to her of what most perplexed me—not so much, I confess, with any hope that she might cast light on my difficulties, as in the assurance that she would not only influence me to think purely and nobly, but would urge me in the search after God. In such a relation of love to religion the vulgar mind will ever imagine ground for ridicule; but those who have most regarded human nature know well enough that the two have constantly manifested themselves in the closest relation; while even the poorest love is the enemy of selfishness unto the death, for the

one or the other must give up the ghost. Not only must God be in all that is human, but of it he must be the root.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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